

CHAPTER ONE – E-Government and the Public Encounter

Purpose

This dissertation is an inquiry into the context and contours of the citizen's encounter with e-government in the emerging virtual state and the related normative and practice implications for public administration in the fast evolving e-government environment. The research seedbed for the project is Internet based e-government manifested through select government web sites at the state and federal level. The expressive, behavioral, and societal aspects of the public encounter will be used as the lenses for focusing the research. The foregoing aspects of the public encounter are derived and adapted from Charles T. Goodsell's research framework in *American Statehouses* (Goodsell, 2000).

The use of a research framework taken from an architectural analytic project for focusing the inquiry on the public encounter is wholly appropriate within the context of cyberspace. This is because cyberspace is no less a built environment than that of traditional physical space with which we are all familiar. Admittedly, the materials used are distinctly different (the tangible vs. the intangible) but the end products are nonetheless the same—a built environment, conceived and fashioned by human beings that is employed in the day-to-day activities and rituals of life.

A corollary activity to the inquiry is the development of prescriptions for public administration academics and practitioners who must function in the new civic space housing e-government: cyberspace. The questions explored in the project are: What are the expressive, behavioral, and societal aspects of the e-government public encounter in the virtual state? What are the implications of e-government for public administration scholars and practitioners? What ideals and values are expressed in the design and presentation of e-government web sites in cyberspace? What constitutes the architecture of cyberspace and how can or might this architecture affect citizens and bureaucrats? What happens to the concept and practice of administrative discretion, or that of due process, in routinized e-government transactions?

Because the terms, *virtual state*, *cyberspace*, *e-government* and *public encounter* will be used throughout this work, their definitions are provided early on for context. The term *virtual state* was coined by a political scientist, Jane E. Fountain, as an outgrowth of her research on the potential effects of information technology on institutional change in government—more specifically—its effect on public bureaucracy. Fountain defined the virtual state as “. . . a government that is organized increasingly in terms of virtual agencies, cross-agency and public-private networks whose structure and capacity depend on the Internet and web” (Fountain, 2001). The term *cyberspace* was first used by the science fiction writer William Gibson. Gibson described cyberspace as a place of unthinkable complexity created by the nexus of the human mind and computer networks (Gibson, 1986). Gibson’s definition predated the general public’s first exposure to the Internet and the World Wide Web by half a decade. However, his definition perforce encompasses both of these advances in information and communication technology (ICT). For the purpose of this work, the terms cyberspace, Internet, and World Wide Web will be considered synonymous. *E-government* is based in cyberspace.

E-government in its simplest formulation is merely government use of ICT and in particular the Internet for improving service delivery, providing and disseminating information, and interacting with users of government services. In its more expansive theorization, e-government is viewed by some as the crucible for implementing direct democracy and reversing long standing trends of declining citizen participation in politics. The focus of this dissertation is not e-democracy¹ but rather that portion of e-government along with its context and contours that are germane to the questions posed.

E-government has been defined in various ways. It has been defined as “the use of electronic information to improve performance, create value, and enable new relationships between governments, business, and citizens. E-government builds links between government entities and their customers and suppliers; it connects jurisdictions, customers, units of government, and

¹ The Minnesota E-Democracy organization founded in 1994 is one of the leaders in promoting e-democracy. The organization has copyrighted the term E-Democracy to preclude its use in the name of any commercial organization. Reference: <http://www.e-democracy.org/>

locations” (Abramson & Means, 2001)² It has also been defined alternatively as “the use of technology to enhance the access to and delivery of government service to benefit citizens, business partners and employees;”³ and, it has been defined in the recently passed E-Government Act of 2002⁴ as:

. . . “electronic Government” means the use by the Government of web-based Internet applications and other information technologies, combined with processes that implement these technologies, to—“(A) enhance the access to and delivery of Government information and services to the public, other agencies, and other Government entities; or“(B) bring about improvements in Government operations that may include effectiveness, efficiency, service quality, or transformation. . . .

The operational definition used for the project is drawn from a 2002 online report *Benchmarking E-Government: A Global Perspective*⁵ issued jointly by the United Nations Division for Public Economics and Public Administration (UNDPEPA) and the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA).

In the broadest definition, e-government can include virtually all information and communication technology (ICT) platforms and applications in use by the public sector. For the purpose of this report however, *e-government is defined as: utilizing the internet and the world-wide-web for delivering government information and services to citizens.* (p. 7, emphasis added)

² Quoting Means, G., & Schneider, D. (2000). *Meta-Capitalism: The E-Business Revolution and the Design of 21st-Century Companies and Markets*. New York: Wiley & Sons, Inc., p. 121.

³ Deloitte Research. (2000). *At the Dawn of e-Government: The Citizen as Customer - State Government Approaches to Customer Service*. 18. Deloitte Consulting and Deloitte & Touche.

⁴ Public Law 107-347 became law on December 17, 2002 during the 107th Congress. The short title of the Act is the “E-Government Act of 2002.” E-government is defined in Title I, Section 3601 of the Act.

⁵ Ronaghan, S. A. (2002). *Benchmarking E-Government: A Global Perspective*. United Nations Division of Public Economics and Public Administration and American Society for Public Administration. Retrieved January 30, 2003, from <http://www.unpan.org/egovernment2.asp#survey>.

UNDPEPA and ASPA are partners in a transnational effort to promote e-government and e-governance and thereby transform the traditional institutions of government and governance. Please note that e-government references throughout the text subsume the UNDPEPA/ASPA definition unless explicitly stated otherwise.

As defined in 1981 (Goodsell, 1981), the *public encounter* was “. . . the interaction of citizen and government official as they communicate to transact matters of interest.” This interaction, a loose proxy for political participation, generally involved two people engaged in purposive interaction not designed to influence the other party but rather for the purpose of exchanging information or securing services. These encounters could be through written communication, by telephone, or face-to-face. However, an essential characteristic of the encounter—regardless of its form—was that it involved a one-on-one interaction with a government official physically located within a public building (a civic space) working for a bureau, department, division, or agency—a public institution. E-government substantially alters these fundamentals.

The public encounter in the e-government environment largely does not involve a one-on-one interaction with an official physically located in an institution of government housed within a public building. It involves a one-to-many computer mediated interaction enabled by software links located on a government Internet web page which presents a wide array of service and or information options for citizens to select. This latter dimension of the e-government encounter is a byproduct of the mass media approach or “something for everyone” mindset so prevalent today.

There are both positive and negative aspects associated with an all-inclusive content approach. On the positive side there is a greater likelihood that the service and or information sought will be available on the web site. The negative aspect relates to the potential waste of time spent searching extraneous content for the appropriate service or information item. For example, the FirstGov.gov web site claims links to 47 million pages⁶ (Larsen & Rainie, 2002). A corollary to this self-selection process is that there may or may not be opportunities for the citizen to interact

⁶ Pages are not synonymous with web sites. Pages represent the content that can be accessed by selecting a link on the web site. Page content may consist of but is not limited to published reports, regulations, public comments, policy statements and related documentation.

by telephone, by e-mail, or face-to-face with an official. In many instances the citizen's only avenue for contact is by e-mail with the "Webmaster;" and, this individual who is generally responsible for web site maintenance may not be the appropriate contact for questions regarding specific content or services.

Thus, the apparent characteristics of the e-government public encounter are its inherent impersonality, expansive service and information choices, its non-physical nature (cyberspace), and the potential for random or accidental accessing of inappropriate services or information as a byproduct of human error or counter intuitive web site design. E-government public encounters in the new civic space of cyberspace are influenced by their built environment just as the public encounters taking place in traditional civic space are.

The distinctions between traditional physically demarcated civic space and the new civic space arise from both the materials used in their construction and their respective uses. Goodsell (1988) describes traditional civic space as those places "that are owned by the state or normally controlled by official agents of the state. . . . This includes spaces owned or controlled by subunits of a national government. . . ." Other dimensions of civic space relate to its accessibility, its purpose and use, and its enclosure.

The dimension of accessibility within traditional civic space relates to its degree of "publicness," that is to say, its availability to the general public within limited or constraining guidelines, e.g., city council chambers, the White House; and, it affords outsiders an opportunity to view and judge the acts of officials. The dimension of purpose refers to the essential nature of civic space—is it used for civic purposes by a given agency, department, bureau or other governmental entity for ritual ceremonies, service delivery, or other specific tasks. The dimension of enclosure relates to the disciplinary or controlling aspects of space that are clearly and strongly demarcated. "In enclosed spaces the opportunity exists to embrace the occupant from all directions, to monopolize the occupant's attention, and to immerse the occupant in a fully controlled set of physical symbols and mood cues" (Goodsell, 1988).

Goodsell's study of political authority through architecture highlights the tremendous power and influence of political man's built environment (city council chambers) upon the scale, pace, and pattern of both civic space and public encounters. Just as the pre-literate man of the Middle Ages "read" the walls of Gothic cathedrals for meaning—the medium of government architecture, though constituted of inanimate materials, is nonetheless alive with expressions of political values. What then of the purpose, dimensions, and political values of web sites and the re-presented content of new civic space?

The physical architecture of civic space is increasingly being complemented and in some instances outright replaced with e-government web sites. These web sites may or may not be owned by a local, state, or federal government entity and are nominally controlled by their agents. They are also built environments that have been "virtually" constructed for the provision of services, the dissemination of information, discussion of policy initiatives, launching of policy initiatives, democratic participation, and a host of other not so readily obvious reasons. The degree of "publicness" of these spaces has to do with the extent of their accessibility within the limited or constraining guidelines of Internet access using available software and hardware.

The dimension of enclosure within e-government is not a physical enclosure but rather "a capture" or enclosure of the citizen's attention and concentration as he/she engages the content—the words, graphics, colors, animation, and sounds—on the web site during the public encounter. The gestalt of the e-government web site can provide the user with a set of symbols and mood cues. Whether or not these symbols and cues are less, more, or of equal power in comparison to those of traditional civic space is open to debate.

There is some evidence that e-government technology and its application alone will not carry the day for the public encounter. There is a documented gap between the information technology haves and have-nots that has been labeled the "digital divide." A 2002 U.S. Department of Commerce report noted that as of September 2001, 49.5% of U.S. households did not have

Internet access.⁷ Lower-income households, households with low levels of overall education, Hispanics, and Blacks were reported least likely to have Internet access.

Brave New World?

In the decade of the 1990s, a wave of heretofore unimaginable technological change swept across the U.S. and the world. The presence of computer technology is widespread in our society today but not yet ubiquitous. As noted earlier, certain segments of our society do not have access to computers and the Internet. However, in spite of this equity issue, profound changes have occurred.

Computers that once filled large rooms and required a dedicated cadre of programmers and operators have been redesigned to fit on the desktops of government, educational, and business institutions. Software programs such as Microsoft's Windows applications supplanted programmer expertise and provided the computer user with an ostensibly intuitive interface which enabled the individual to direct his or her attention to using the technology for enhancing productivity. The linking of computers into communication "networks" and those networks into what we now unselfconsciously call the "World Wide Web" or "Internet" has transformed, and continues to transform, our lives and institutions in ways we have yet to apprehend.

Some of these transformations are readily apparent in our everyday lives. A new vocabulary has emerged wherein we speak of and hold conversations about cyberspace, virtual reality, going online, e-commerce, e-mail, and now e-government. Other transformations may not be as evident as we spend more of our time interfacing with our computers and their progeny such as the personal digital assistant (PDA) to accomplish day-to-day mundane tasks like corresponding with a colleague through e-mail, locating a phone number, or registering our automobile. There is some evidence that the computer interface has become a proxy for what Goffman referred to as "face time." Goffman's work on the relevance of physical proximity to relationship formation stressed "face-to-face" interaction as the "ideal projective fields" for defining who we are and

⁷ *A Nation Online: How Americans Are Expanding Their Use of the Internet.* (2002). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce. (p. 73)

what we want (Goffman, 1961). The time spent in this activity was “face time.” Goffman argued that in the absence of personal contact, efforts to communicate needs or desires become increasingly difficult.

For all who embrace this “brave new world,” and, for those who choose not to, the context of their lives is nonetheless transformed. For some, these transformations may portend an unparalleled freedom of action and choice. For others, there may be an uncomfortable awareness that their lives and those of their children are being circumscribed and organized around, or by, the technology.

The hallmark of this brave new world is access to almost infinite amounts of information. This greatly expanded access to information alternatively serves as a proxy for power and control (bi-directional), a potential opportunity for greater participation in institutions of governance, and egalitarianism. Regardless of how access to this information may be perceived, there is often an overlooked contextual aspect. Although veritable galaxies of information are now just a few key clicks away from an individual’s PDA, computer screen or phone display, the context required for understanding that information and thereby transforming it into knowledge is not.

The physical space and physical presence of people who populate the boardrooms, classrooms, homes, communities, government offices, and legislative hallways do and will continue to provide the requisite context for information transformation and the public encounter. What effects this collective transformative process may have upon our futures and institutions cannot be predicted. Nevertheless, we must attempt to envision how our lives, communities, and system of government may change. We have a responsibility to examine the possibilities and promote a vision of the future that is arrived at through critical examination and ongoing discourse—as opposed to mere happenstance.

Twenty-two years ago a group of public administration scholars argued that “The public encounter—where individual citizen and public servant interact—is one of the most crucial aspects of modern government, and, it is startling to realize, one of the least understood” (Goodsell, 1981). The sad reality is that in spite of the groundbreaking work of these scholars,

the public encounter is today an even less understood aspect of modern government. This is because the essential elements that helped define the public encounter have undergone a quantum change in the past twenty-two years.

The decade of the 1990s also saw the emergence of two new phenomena made possible by the Internet. The first gave rise to the latter phenomenon we now colloquially refer to as e-government. That first phenomenon was the deployment of web-based distribution, service, and shopping channels on the Internet. Popularly referred to as e-commerce or as dot.com enterprises, the marriage of corporate computer networks with the Internet signaled the beginning of the end of the Internet as primarily an open public source for information sharing and dissemination. The development of cyberspace by commercial interests had been launched.

Commerce moved online in land rush fashion reminiscent of the early West homesteaders. Businesses aggressively competed to stake their respective claims to a portion of cyberspace by registering unique web site addresses, e.g., Buy.com, E-Bay.com, and Amazon.com and by advertising their new locations on television and other media outlets. The general public approached e-commerce cautiously because of real concerns about personal information and the actual privacy of online transactions behind the transparent web page interface. This caution was well founded.

Computer hackers (computer information pirates) successfully broke into several of the early e-commerce web sites and downloaded customer credit card information. Egghead Software.com was a victim of one of the more highly publicized instances of the hacking of a so called “secure web site.” The dot.coms and credit card companies responded with better web site security and policies to reimburse customers for losses arising from the use of purloined credit data. These efforts helped allay the concerns of the public. That portion of the public with Internet access gradually took to the idea of going online to shop for products and services. It is important to note, however, that instances of data theft from so called secure web sites, both public and private, still do occur from time-to-time as hackers improve their skills and techniques to match the latest security steps instituted.

The public's exposure to e-commerce web sites and the discovered ease of point-and-click commercial services and shopping generated a corresponding desire of the public that government services and products also be made available in the same convenient way. The seven day a week, twenty-four-hour a day, access of e-commerce web portals would ultimately become the model for government services delivered via the Internet.

The business community and leadership at all levels of government helped nurture the initial nascent desire for Internet based government services. The enormous potential business opportunities and cost savings e-government represented through reduced transaction costs and greater efficiencies of operation provided the impetus.

The Clinton administration's National Performance Review (NPR) project, led by Vice-President Gore beginning in 1993, was instrumental in pressing the e-government case. NPR recommendations called for a coordinated broad based implementation of information and communication technology at the federal level (Fountain, 2001). A June 22, 2000 article in the online version of the Economist⁸ described one example of the business potential and government savings e-government represented as follows:

. . . Since 1996, a pioneering project called ServiceArizona has allowed them (citizens) to carry out a growing range of transactions on the web, from ordering personalized number plates to replacing lost ID cards. Instead of having to stand in a queue at the motor vehicle department, they can go online and renew their registrations 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in a transaction that takes an average of two minutes.

What is more, ServiceArizona has not cost taxpayers a cent to set up, and is free to users. The website was built and is maintained by IBM, which is being paid 2% of the value of each transaction—about \$4 for each vehicle registration. But

⁸ Symonds, M. (2000). The Next Revolution: After e-commerce, get ready for e-government. 6. Internet: The Economist Newspaper Group. Retrieved February 23, 2001, from http://www.economist.com/printerfriendly.cfm?story_id=80746

because processing an online request costs only \$1.60, compared with \$6.60 for a counter transaction, the state also saves money. (p. 1)

E-government implementation at the local, state, and federal levels is dramatically changing both the way government operates and interacts with citizens, business, interest groups, and with other levels of government. While e-government may have begun life as a crude add-on or complement to traditional physically based service delivery models, it has evolved into something much more robust. However, the implications and unintended consequences of this ongoing evolution are just beginning to be addressed. Moreover, the effects this evolution will have on the institutional based scope and character of the public encounter are also unknown.

The Literature Gap

A great deal of the literature touting the promise and possibilities of e-government fails to describe the institutional and organizational complexities of existing government arrangements or provide more than perfunctory discussions of government's normative foundations. The public administration scholar or practitioner reading this literature may conclude that the e-government proponents' knowledge of government has been hastily acquired. In a 2000 PA Times article a practitioner argued that calls to integrate or embed information technology within government structures should be preceded by critical reflection on both the governmental and societal implications (Katz, 2000).

Our society needs to make sense of how government is responding to the changes caused by rapid advances in IT and telecommunications. Many of those writing about IT are not broadly interested in or knowledgeable about government. Business school professors, lawyers, and corporate information officers view the relation of IT and government through the prisms of their own professional values and personal inclinations. *Government is not their central frame of reference* (emphasis added). (p. 5)

Current e-government discourse can be characterized as a cacophony of competing themes. Words and phrases such as customer, customer-centric, citizen-centric, enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, innovation, privatization, and entrepreneurial are the currency of this discourse. And, if there is any one word that resonates louder than the others in this chorus it is still—efficiency.

More than fifty years ago Dwight Waldo (1948) discussed “The Gospel of Efficiency,” in his seminal work on the administrative state. He posited that a word or a phrase could sometimes epitomize a world-view and serve as a baseline by which “all else can be measured.” Efficiency was, and still is, such a word. E-government may become such a phrase if the efficiency focus holds sway over the inherently normative and democratic dimensions of our government.

The Efficiency Gospel was a cornerstone of the Progressive Era that was inextricably linked with the emerging industrialization of the nation. E-government is perhaps inextricably linked with the ongoing development and growth of an information technology enabled nation.

The preeminence of efficiency, Waldo argued, arose from the fact that the essence of our civilization was dominantly that of the machine. Frederick W. Taylor’s gospel of scientific management and the “one best way” crudely bridged the chasm between machine efficiency and that of human enterprise (Taylor, 1911). Efficient human enterprise, i.e., commercial enterprise, was thus conceived as optimizing outputs or production while minimizing resources—the one best way. Herbert A. Simon argued that although this conceptualization of efficiency has a legitimate utility in commercial organizations where money is the common denominator for measures of output and income, its utility in public organizations is problematic where difficult decisions must be made while considering measures other than money, i.e., the public interest or public health (Simon, 1997).

Simon’s solution was to incorporate the concept of value in the efficiency model. The putative result was that decisions among varying alternatives for maximizing results for a given resource allocation were conscious policy choices arrived at after carefully weighing the organization’s goals. Simon’s solution is one that we should perhaps revisit as we attend to the siren song of e-

government. We should consider the explicit and the implicit values of the computer mediated public encounter and the new civic space in which it takes place.

Are access and participation synonymous in this venue? Access in the e-government model is merely the ability of the individual, using the appropriate hardware and software, to go online and locate the appropriate government web site. The implicit assumption in this simplistic access model is that there are no citizen “outliers,” i.e., semi-literate, visually impaired or otherwise disabled individuals logging on; and, that the instructions provided are crystal clear to all. These are considerations, in part, of equity and participation as well as that of access. Access thus construed has to be a minimal criterion. Once an individual has access to the information, assuming that the content provided is coherent, then what? Are we to assume that individuals accessing information will universally be able to incorporate it within their *Weltanschauung*? If the information is ambiguous, what individual or ancillary technology will be available to interpret or explain it to the individual?

Participation is far more problematic than access. This is particularly so when we begin to ponder virtual participation, i.e., participation by e-mail or other digital means such as a fax, not requiring the individual’s physical presence. Participation at the most basic level is providing input or feedback, contributing, being involved with, or taking part in an activity—engaging in discourse. All of these subsume a context for the action of participation that requires knowledge of the process and the subject matter—even at the most elemental point-and-click transaction level.

The e-government public encounter raises questions of not just technical means but also issues of fundamental democratic theory. Will Joseph Schumpeter’s elitist vision of democratic participation or Carole Pateman’s egalitarian view obtain in the new civic space?—Neither outcome is preordained (Pateman, 1970; Schumpeter, 1975). However, as we ponder these respective visions, we need to consider what effects the increasing shift to e-government public encounters will have upon the institutions and people that are necessary to sustain them—the bureaucracy. The political scientist, Jane Fountain, has conducted research on the effects of information technology upon bureaucracy but she argues that much more focused research on the

topic is needed within political science. In 1999, she argued that: “There is little theory and no coherent research program within the discipline of political science that seeks to account for the potential or likely effects of major changes in information processing on the bureaucracy” p. 133. Two years later the situation remained virtually unchanged as Fountain (2001) argued that:

As the use of the Internet unfolds, questions central to institutional thought persist with increasing force. How are bureaucratic policymakers using networked computing? Are they negotiating new institutional arrangements as a result? To what extent and in what ways are they constrained by current institutional arrangements? What extensions of institutional theory are necessary to take account of fundamental changes in organizational communication, coordination, and control? (p. 4)

Fountain’s arguments about the paucity of research in political science on the effects of information technology on government institutions and the bureaucracy are benchmarks that we in public administration also cannot ignore. However, within public administration, a body of research is accumulating as public administration and social science scholars begin to address some of the theoretical and practice questions of ICT’s effects on government operations. The work of Castells and others have been instrumental in setting the stage for additional inquiry into the implications of e-government for public administration (Castells, 1997; Castells, 2000; Fountain, 1999; Fountain, 2001; Garson, 1998; Garson, 2003; Kakabadse, Kakabadse, & Kouzmin, 2003; Kamarck & Nye, 1999; Kamarck & Nye Jr., 2002; La Porte, Demchak, & de Jong, 2002; Peled, 2001; West, 2000; West, 2001; West, 2002 and Yates & Van Maanen, 2000). While this is a good start, a conspicuous gap still exists in two key areas—the normative and practice implications for public administration.

This dissertation is intended to selectively address some of the normative and practice gaps by developing prescriptions for public administration academics and practitioners who must function in the new civic space of e-government. This dissertation is also intended to expand upon the work of Goodsell in the areas of the public encounter and the social meaning of civic

space by examining the gestalt of the built environment—in the e-government domain on citizens.

One of the more salient problems confronting inquiries into e-government is the quintessential multidisciplinary nature of any such enterprise. The political science and public administration literatures on e-government have been slow to develop. However literatures in other fields have been examining the effects of information technology and the Internet upon government functions for some time. The literatures of democratic, communication, and information design theory are notable cases in point. The inherent multidisciplinary nature of this dissertation dictates that these other literatures not be ignored, but they are not the focus of the project. They will be used and incorporated only to the extent that they provide a deeper basis for understanding the broader implications of the central focus of the dissertation—the citizen's encounter with e-government in the emerging virtual state and the related normative and practice implications for public administration in the fast evolving e-government environment.

Is E-Government Enough?

Is it wise to view e-government as the panacea for government's ills? Can information technology be grafted onto the institutions of government to restore citizens' faith and trust in government? Are measures of technological efficiency and effectiveness meaningful proxies for well managed, "good," or responsive government?

Lawrence K. Grossman (1995) identified what a reformer should carefully consider in the pursuit of improved efficiency and/or increased political participation through information technology use:

. . . technology by itself is inherently neither educational nor frivolous, neither empowering nor debilitating, neither uplifting nor degrading, neither democratic nor authoritarian, neither informative nor manipulative. Its mere arrival on the scene will not assure a revolution in education or in politics. Technology by itself will not automatically determine the path of the future or the nature of the

political process, although it is bound to have enormous influence on both. Everything depends on how the technology is used, by whom, and for what purposes. (p. 170)

Today, we speak of the Information Age, or Information Revolution, as though it provides a path to or that it will, a priori, create a reality that both promotes the general welfare and sustains the institutions and processes of democratic governance. These assumptions have not been critically examined by the academic community. Although multiple fictional scenarios of e-government have been provided by the media and idealized, or catastrophic outcomes have been suggested by authors writing for the general public, there is no established critical body of public administration scholarship on the subject of e-government. Missing is an inquiry into the normative implications of this change and the possible effects on the normative assumptions that are inherent in our system of government, i.e., regime values.

Are cursor movements and web site access suitable proxies for political access or participation? For that matter, can issues such as, equity, privacy, participation, and due process be virtually confronted or resolved in cyberspace? The e-government public encounter is at the nexus of these process and normative issues.

Approximately two years ago, at the close of the second millennium, several critical articles and books were written. These works bemoaned the snail's pace of e-government implementation by government at all levels, urged caution in implementation efforts to avoid raising false expectations, and suggested that the institutional changes wrought by e-government should be researched to determine the effects on the bureaucracy (Fountain, 1999; Fountain, 2001; La Porte et al., 2002; Laurent, 2000; Sayer, 2000). Other issues raised in these works included government's concerns about the "millennium bug" (Y2K) on their networks and their desire to address the problem; the critical shortage of qualified in-house or privately contracted personnel to implement and maintain the systems needed; concerns about access with approximately only 50% of U.S. homes possessing an Internet connection; and, governments' role as non-competitive monopoly providers of almost all public services. Fast forward to 2002 and the landscape of e-government implementation has changed dramatically.

Both the quality and variety of citizen e-government public encounters have improved (West, 2002). Moreover, a recent report documented that those served by e-government have embraced it as well. An April 2002 report by the Pew Foundation's Internet and American Life project noted the following:

Overall, 60% of government web site users say such sites had improved their interactions with at least one level of government. Half of government web site users (49%) say the Internet has improved the way they interact with the federal government; 44% say it has improved the way they interact with their state government; and 30% say the Internet has improved the way they interact with local government.⁹ (p. 2)

E-government has become the latest model for governmental reform. However, the e-government model is singularly different from the four historical tides of governmental reform that Paul Light identified (Light, 1997). E-government is an amalgamation of those four tides and should perhaps be characterized as an ocean. Light's four tides were scientific management, the war on waste, the watchful eye, and liberation management. All four tides are evident in the current e-government discourse.

Efficiency is at the core of the scientific management reform philosophy wherein the endless quest is for the "one best way" of accomplishing a given task (Taylor, 1911). Efficiency of operation presumes that the one best way has been arrived at. The often stated byproduct of identifying and implementing the one best way is—economy of operation through reduced resource expenditure. Taken together, efficiency and economy, the explicitly stated key objectives of e-government, reflect both the scientific management and war on waste tides of reform (Enos, 2000; National Association of State Information Resource Executives, 2000).

⁹ Larsen, E., & Rainie, L. (2002). The rise of the e-citizen: How people use government agencies' Web sites. 20. Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved January 27, 2003, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/index.asp>

The watchful eye and liberation management tides are also easily discerned in the current e-government discourse. Watchful eye reforms have focused on both the fairness and openness of government in its interactions with individual citizens, interest groups, and the business community. Light (1997) identified fairness, rights, and information as some of the key characteristics of watchful eye reform efforts. Some E-government proponents have argued that it is both fair and open in that arbitrary decisions can be minimized, if not altogether eliminated by software, and that citizens and others are provided with expanded access to information and in some instances access to public officials (Inbar, 1979;¹⁰ La Porte et al., 2002; Rosenblatt, 1999). Liberation management, a recast reform concept that achieved popular currency during the reinvention exegesis (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993), is simply a concerted effort to assist employees in achieving optimum performance and improved outcomes and results, i.e., service delivery. The foregoing is accomplished by eliminating barriers such as red tape, restructuring the organization to focus on core services, promoting teamwork, and empowering employees. Some proponents have argued that E-government is the ideal platform for empowering employees, focusing organizational goals and objectives, and promoting teamwork.

It is important to note that the preceding tides of reform flowing through current e-government discourse are only typologies used to grossly summarize trends. The discourse of e-government is instead an evolving nascent canon. New centers and institutes for e-government seem to emerge daily at universities, think tanks, corporations, and foundations. A popular conception of the e-government model, though not yet fully a reality, consists of how the Internet enables citizens to gain access to all government services and products seven-days-a-week, twenty-four-hours a day. For the most part, the largest number of e-government services available on the Internet are the high volume, simple transaction activities such as information dissemination, driver license renewal, income tax filing, reserving campsites, and submitting employment information (Coates, 2001). And, it is important to note that for most state and federal web sites only 23% of these transactions can be wholly completed online (West, 2002). However, this trend is changing rapidly. In 2002, 42 million Americans used government web sites to research

¹⁰ Inbar's work predates e-government emergence by approximately 25 years. However, his theoretical exploration of using computer software to automate routine bureaucratic transactions, e.g., vehicle license renewal, was nonetheless part of the vision that has become e-government. Inbar, M. (1979). *Routine Decision-Making: The Future of Bureaucracy*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

public policy questions, 23 million sent comments via the Internet to public officials, and 14 million researched their voting decisions online (Larsen & Rainie, 2002).

Supporters of e-government tout it as “anytime, anywhere” government access. However, e-government is much more than the citizen using his or her personal computer, cell phone, or personal digital assistant (PDA) to log onto the Internet and access government. E-government also includes business-to-government and nonprofit-to-government relationships. E-government represents nothing less than a fundamental shift in the way Americans will perceive and interact with all levels of government.

Although the technological infrastructure that makes e-government possible is analogous to that driving the business revolution of e-commerce, there is a profound difference in organizing principles and overall objectives. In the first instance, the broad principles and overall objectives of U.S. government in general are to sustain a republican form of government and promote the general welfare of the citizenry while adhering to regime values. Only in the second instance are the principles and overall objectives to generate profits for shareholders and grow and sustain the business.

Much has been written about the capacity of e-government to enliven citizen political participation and to improve the efficiency of government service delivery and information provision. Very little, however, has been written about the effects e-government may have on altering fundamental conceptions of government, the citizen’s encounters with it, or the effects of substituting “cyberspace” for the physical spaces constitutive of traditional civic space. These issues are of particular import for public administration scholars and practitioners because they bear substantively on the contextual bases for theorizing and action.

Dissertation Plan

The questions addressed in this project broadly focus upon the context and contours of the citizen's encounter with e-government in the emerging virtual state and the related normative and practice implications for public administration in the rapidly evolving e-government environment. Though individually restated below, the questions raised in this inquiry should be considered as an integrated exploration of a complex environment: e-government. There are no single, simple questions, or answers in the multidisciplinary topography of e-government. The five questions explored in the project are:

1. What constitutes the architecture of cyberspace and how can or might this architecture affect citizens and bureaucrats?
2. What are the expressive, behavioral, and societal aspects of the e-government public encounter in the virtual state?
3. What ideals and values are expressed in the design and presentation of e-government web sites in cyberspace?
4. What happens to the concept and practice of administrative discretion, or that of due process, in routinized e-government transactions?
5. What are the implications of e-government for public administration scholars and practitioners?

An analysis of both the functional and architectural dimensions of select state and federal government web sites will be undertaken. This will be built upon the work of West (2000, 2001, 2002), which has been adapted so to analyze web site values when they are expressed as the presence or lack of certain functional features. For example, the value of equity is derived in part from the absence or presence of features such as a text version of the web site for the color blind or a foreign language option for individuals who speak a language other than English.

The architectural perspective builds upon Goodsell's (2000) analytic framework for architectural interpretation which has been adapted to explore the meanings, behaviors, and emotions that web site architecture may contain and or evoke. This framework will also serve as the primary means for integrating the multidisciplinary nature of the inquiries explored in the project, including related findings and their explication. Goodsell's framework delineates three lenses for interpreting the influence of architecture upon human activity.

The three lenses are the expressive, the behavioral, and the societal. Each lens provides a distinct perspective for interpreting the influence of web site architecture. At the expressive level, addressing normative considerations such as the values embedded in web site design features, the value of equity could be discerned in features which facilitate site use by the disabled. At the behavioral level, addressing aesthetic considerations such as the effects of information density in web site design on citizen use, frustration may arise from information too dense and thus difficult to search. And at the societal level, the use of symbols to convey power, status, or proxy images for the institution will be examined and interpreted for latent messages and for their potential effects on the citizen.

A comparative examination of the competing visions of e-government will be also be conducted in an effort to identify the dominant themes of current e-government discourse and their potential effects on both administrative discretion and due process. The field research components of the project, employing focus groups and a survey instrument, will serve as a fulcrum for balancing and testing assumptions developed. The focus groups will be used to validate the expressive, behavioral, and societal lens interpretations. For example, focus group members will be asked to rate a small representative sample of web sites on design openness or ease of searching and use of hyperlinks. The focus group research participants will also be asked to describe how and what they feel when viewing selected web sites—e.g., ease, frustration, and so forth. The survey instrument will be used to gauge participants' general perceptions of and feelings about e-government and any related personal experiences. The theoretical assumptions and the research findings derived will be synthesized within the expressive, behavioral, and societal lenses. Dominant normative and practice implications of e-government will then be summarized and prescriptions offered.