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Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything

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empire was to take its place as a maritime power, while he harbored distrust of Italian commitment to the alliance.

Twelve years of active service in the former Yugoslav navy sparked Vego's interest in the naval history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Vego, professor of operations at the U.S. Naval War College, conducted his research in Austria and Washington, D.C., but relied primarily on published works for documents from other European powers. My only serious criticism of this work is the omission of maps; two are not sufficient. Even a reader familiar with Austro-Hungarian history needs visual aids showing the specific locations of port cities and areas in dispute in the Turco-Italian War and the Balkan crises.

The title *Austro-Hungarian Naval Policy, 1904–14* is misleading, for this work offers much more. It provides an excellent overview of not only Triple Alliance naval policy but also its effect on the Triple Entente's strategy. Vego addresses as well the politics within the alliance and Germany's dominant role. London understood Vienna's dreadnought construction as a response to Berlin's demands and thus viewed the Dual Monarchy as a German tool, just as it would during World War I. This monograph presents a background of events that contributed to the outbreak of war in 1914, by describing the crises in the Balkans and the Turco-Italian War. Any reader interested in early twentieth-century European history generally and naval policy specifically should read this work.

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Gleick, James. *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*. New York: Pantheon, 1999. 324pp. $24

James Gleick's book points to the fact that the human condition is moving at a speed that sometimes makes us feel as if we are living a blur. Not only do we feel that we are moving at a fast-forward pace, but we find ourselves frustrated by the absence of leisure time despite all the conveniences the modern world offers us. Gleick makes the point that people deal more with the perception of time than with the reality of it. "Time is defined, analyzed, measured, and even constructed by humans. . . . [T]ime is not a thing you have lost. It is not a thing you have ever had. It is what you live in. You can drift in its currents, or you can swim." For the software industry, where development cycles are shrinking every quarter and distribution has moved from the retail store to instant downloading from the Internet, life is also accelerating. Gleick's primary focus, however, is on how people

try to bring perception in line with reality. Time needs to be managed to reflect the kind of life you want to live.

In *Faster,* Gleick makes the argument that people are trying to accomplish more and more in the same amount of time through a variety of means. He makes his case by devoting entire chapters to seemingly endless examples of multitasking, rapid task-switching, and parallel processing—methods of accelerating our lives—and he discusses some of the consequences of those actions. For example, multitasking assumes a level of efficiency. How many of us can engage in a telephone conversation and respond to an electronic-mail message simultaneously? Closely aligned with multitasking is information flow. Gleick notes that as an information flow accelerates, it becomes more difficult to track. For instance, how do we distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information? Perhaps intuition and experience take over. Gleick also discusses speed, reminding us of the slogan, "Speed is God, and time is the devil."

Gleick observes that as we move through life, we are constrained by time. How long will it take you to read this review and move on to another? Too long? Perhaps a speed-reading course is in order! One of the main shortfalls of the book is that the author fails to recommend the best way to manage our time. How do we find equilibrium between our personal lifetime goals and the curves thrown at us by an uncertain world?

Gleick's observations are relevant to current directions in naval planning. For the U.S. Navy, speed is a critical advantage when responding to crises. The Navy also holds that the faster you are able to make decisions or deploy your forces, the better tactical decisions you are likely to make. But what are the trade-offs? Recently, the U.S. Navy embarked on the development of a new concept that promises a better way to integrate its various platforms.

Known as network-centric warfare, it is meant to provide a comprehensive approach to warfighting in the twenty-first century. Concepts like the speed of command and an integrated situational picture theoretically will allow senior commanders to reach better conclusions based on complete and timely data regarding battlefield conditions. Intervals of time will not change, but senior commanders will feel as if they are being squeezed even more than usual under time-sensitive or stressful conditions. Can the human mind take advantage of a networked community of information in real time? Will the pace of battle or the challenges of a military campaign be less stressful in an integrated environment? Can military commanders

manage their time "better" under stressful conditions given this complex architecture? How can military commanders manage their time as the pace of events or the quality of their situational awareness increases?

Unfortunately, Gleick only hints at the directions that must be taken to answer these questions. Time feels increasingly precious as more demands are placed upon us, even when more relevant information is provided. Experience teaches us how to sort the most important data, but will experience continue to serve us as we are forced to sort through exponentially larger amounts of information? Or is there some limit to our ability to accomplish goals within a finite period? Gleick does not tell us; perhaps time will.

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