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## This Month in **HISTORY**

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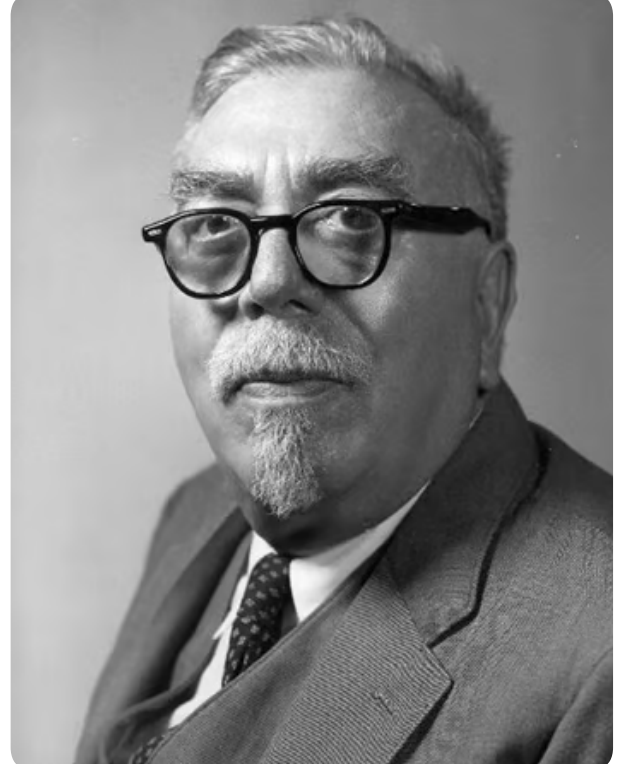
In 1948, a mathematician published a strange little book that nobody could quite categorize. Scientists, engineers, philosophers and possibly a few conspiracy theorists all claimed it. It belongs to all of them.

**W**e all agree on a few things, hopefully. Messi is the GOAT of Football. Newton owns Physics. Well, just so we don't cause an internet riot, let's give Einstein the credit for relativity. But somewhere along the way, we forgot to talk about the man who looked at brains, machines, missiles and markets and realized they were all doing the same thing. His name was Norbert Wiener. And in 1948, he named a science.

Imagine you're trying to describe a field that doesn't exist yet. You can feel it; it's in the way anti-aircraft guns learn to predict where a plane will be, not just where it is. It's in the way your hand corrects itself mid-reach when you grab a glass. It's in the way markets respond to information. The thing you're noticing is everywhere, but it has no name.

In 1948, Norbert Wiener gave it one. The book was called *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. The title alone was a provocation. Animals and machines, in the same sentence, as if they were the same kind of thing. At the time, that was a radical idea.

Wiener had spent World War II trying to solve a specific problem: how do you build a gun that can shoot down a fast-moving aircraft?



Norbert Wiener, 1963. Photo: Garry Olsh, Wikimedia Commons, CCO 1.0 (Public Domain)

The gun fires a shell that takes time to reach its target. By then, the plane has moved. So you can't aim at where the plane is, you have to aim at where it will be. That requires prediction. A system that learns from its own errors and continuously corrects itself.

That's a feedback loop. And Wiener realized that feedback loops were everywhere. A person reaching for a cup of coffee is running the same fundamental algorithm as a heat-seeking missile.

What made *Cybernetics* unusual was more than the ideas, it was the audacity of the framing. Wiener wasn't writing for a single discipline. He was writing for anyone willing to see the pattern. Engineers read it as a control theory. Biologists read it as a theory of life.

Philosophers read it as a challenge to what it even means to be alive versus mechanical.

That ambiguity wasn't a bug. It was the point. Wiener believed that the deepest problems; in science, in society, lived at the borders between disciplines. The word cybernetics was chosen deliberately: from the Greek *kybernētēs*, meaning steersman. Someone who steers. Someone who guides a system toward a destination through constant adjustment.

Written by:

Oluwatosin "Tosin" Kolade

Seventy-eight years later, that steersman is still at the wheel, inside every adaptive system, every intelligent machine, every interface between a human and a tool.

Not bad for a book nobody could quite categorize.

Or perhaps that's exactly why it mattered.

After all, the most important ideas rarely stay in one discipline for very long.

You know Messi. You know Newton. Now you know Wiener. Pass it on.