

Calendar for Week #2

Monday, October 3

The topic for this week is Charles Babbage and the designs he created in the 19th century for two computers: the Difference Engine and the far more powerful Analytical Engine. Monday's class will focus on the Difference Engine, but I'll also show an abbreviated version of the film *To Dream Tomorrow*, which describes the life of Ada Augusta Byron (later Lady Lovelace) who worked closely with Babbage on his computing machines.

Readings: In general, this section of each calendar handout describes the readings that should be completed *prior* to that class. For October 3, please read Chapter 1 of the course reader, which describes both of Babbage's designs.

Reminder: Please bring your calendars to class on Monday so that we can take a poll on times for the various field trips and special events.

Special event: Introductory seminars function best if we can all get to know one another as soon as possible. To promote that, I'd like to invite everyone who can to accompany back to Gates at the end of class and play some of the approximately 400 board games that my wife and I have collected over the years. If you have favorites, let me know, and I'll make sure to bring them along.

Wednesday, October 5

On Wednesday, we'll finish up the discussion of Charles Babbage, focusing on the Analytical Engine, which will get you ready for the homework assignment that will go out that day. I also want to have a short discussion about how the world might have changed had Babbage completed his machines, ushering in the computer age a century earlier. Several authors have considered this problem in fiction. William Gibson and Bruce Sterling—two authors associated with the science-fiction subgenre of “cyberpunk”—took on that question in their 1991 novel *The Difference Engine*. In this novel, Babbage's machines allow the information revolution to happen alongside the industrial revolution, leading to all sorts of changes in Victorian society. More recently, artist and film animator Sydney Padua published a graphic novel entitled *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage: The (Mostly) True Story of the First Computer*, which imagines what might have happened if Lovelace and Babbage had built the Analytical Engine and used it to solve mysteries.