Science fiction, utopia and dystopia:

Before going into detail about the material dealt with in class, it might be important to give a definition of the terms "utopia" as well as "dystopia":
Firstly, both terms describe possible future scenarios when talking about science fiction as invented by authors like e.g. Margaret Atwood and presented in films such as "The Hunger Games".
Nevertheless, there is a difference too concerning utopia and dystopia: **Utopia** describes a positive future scenario, meaning a not yet existing place. Often, a utopia employs ideas of absolute social and economic equality.
Dystopia is the opposite of utopia describing oppressive societies and grim. It deals with the loss of freedom of the individual. Often, the destiny of a tragic hero is descried who (tries to) fight(s) the regime (e.g. main character Katniss in "The Hunger Games").

1. Texts and films dealt with in class:

- <u>Little Brother Is Watching:</u>
  Kirn transfers Orwell's novel "1984" to modern times, e. g. by underlining that there is no "Big" Brother today but that everyone can be a "little" brother instead if he or she takes pictures / films (and puts the result on the internet): invasion of privacy
    → Little Brother can also do services to society: someone can be made famous, crimes could be revealed

- <u>The Hunger Games: (worksheet and film)</u>
    → The beginnings of the Capitol and the former thirteen districts (Panem) and its history (the disasters and the Dark Days) are told to the members of the districts who are gathered at the square→ to remind people that the Capitol brought peace and prosperity to them
    → The rules of the Hunger Games are explained in the text: the tributes (each district has to provide two) have to fight against each other until they are all dead but one, the winner who will be rewarded abundantly; to make it humiliating and torturous, the Hunger Games must be celebrated by the members of the districts as a great sporting event or party
    → Fate of the teenager Katniss, her sister and mother is in the focus of interest (she is selected as a tribute and revolts against the dictatorship of the Capitol and the resulting social inequality between the districts)

  ➔ Another version of a future scenario (dystopia)

- Gattaca:
  - → a society where genetic engineering of the unborn children* became a common phenomenon: everyone is healthier/stronger, in general optimised → designer babies come into being
  - → through PDG (**P**reimplantation **G**enetic **D**iagnosis), an early triage happens. PDG is a prenatal examination method: a few days after the fertilisation, the researchers take out of the embryo one or two cells. These cells are now analysed for diseases like mucoviscidosis or other chromosomal disorders. The cells who pass the test are then re-implanted in the mother-to-be; this method is practised since 20 years already → not part of the future scenario!
  - → your job/associations/insurance is a decision based on your genetic make-up → total control by the government, no freedom of decision anymore
  - → all benefits are yours, as long as you are not a "faith child", meaning that you are born naturally and not engineered for perfection; those children are socially disadvantaged→ splitting of society
  - → another possibility of a future scenario (**dystopia**)

1984 (George Orwell):

- → this future scenario can be clearly identified as a **dystopia** as the world is presented as dark and lifeless and the citizen are suppressed by the so-called "party" (that forces them to wear uniforms); the citizen (including the main character Winston Smith) are watched all day by a face that belongs to the "Big Brother". → no privacy or freedom
- → telescreens, propaganda ("Hate Week"), Thought Police, Room 101, Newspeak (= language as a means to control), propaganda => written in 1948, "1984" abounds in and exaggerates Nazi Germany mechanisms of state control

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley:

- Doppelgänger motive:
- → It originates in thrillers and gothic novels
- → similar to a multiple personality living outside the body, the disposal of the own ego (Frankenstein and his monster)
- → Frankenstein and his monster develop a love-hate relationship: The creature spares his creator (love), but kills the whole family (hate)
- → No one can escape from each other, they are both "cursed" to meet again and again
- → Monster shows Frankenstein that he is a monster too (because he created it) → identification
- → Both are intelligent beings, what makes it difficult for the reader to distinguish between the monstrous part and the human in both the monster and Frankenstein

- **Aspect of hubris:**
  - → Hubris/hubristic means "playing God": if e.g. a scientist takes the liberty of experimenting with the human genome, he enables himself to be "God", namely to create or destroy (human) livings → much power is connected to this and the wish of being able to control things (cf. Prometheus / Greek mythology)
  - → Frankenstein is hubristic because he creates the monster, but it backfires and the aftermath is devastating: things go out of control because Frankenstein doesn't face the consequences / does not take over responsibility for his creation; his mutual reaction: human feeling of fear/panic

- **Brave New World:**
  - → Is a dystopia in which an all-powerful state controls the behaviour and actions of its people in order to preserve its own stability and power. One major difference between the two is that, whereas in *1984* control is maintained by constant government surveillance, secret police, and torture, power in **Brave New World** is maintained **through technological interventions** that start before birth and last until death, and that actually change what people want. The government of *1984* maintains power through force and intimidation. The government of *Brave New World* retains control by making its citizens so happy and superficially fulfilled that they don't care about their personal freedom. In *Brave New World* the consequences of state control are a loss of dignity, morals, values, and emotions → loss of humanity
  - → Genetic engineering / cloning; Alphas, Betas… Gammas = stupid; sleep-teaching / hypnopaedia; natural birth = disgusting; sex and drugs (soma) as means of keeping citizens happy => "everyone belongs to everyone else" / no "families", no old people; motto of the world state: community – identity - stability

Oryx and Crake:

Content:

Oryx and Crake is told from the vantage point of a man named Snowman. Snowman is living in an outdoor setting near a body of water with a group of seemingly alien entities called Crakers. They ask him many questions and bring him one fish each week. Snowman exhibits a great deal of anger towards a man named Crake. In contrast, he is very fond of, and still hears the voice of Oryx, a woman with whom he fell in love before.

Characters:

Jimmy/Snowman: main character, the story is told through his eyes/is a memory of him (frame story: Snowman in the destroyed world (left behind by Crake*) talking to the Crakers, taking care of them; end of novel: discovers that there are more survivors → open end whether Snowman talks to them or not); loves Oryx (sexual relationship despite the fact that she is in a relationship with Crake)

Mother Sharon: her job: genetic splicing; sees the laboratory animals as living beings; she escapes because she is dissatisfied with her life at the Compound

Father: geneticist that worked with pigs used for human organ harvesting; disappointed that his boy Jimmy isn't interested in science the way he is (no talent or passion);

Crake/Glenn: Jimmy meets him before Ramona's departure, they become friends (visit porno websites, play games et cetera); both see Oryx for the first time on the Internet (porn website as she was a child); During his work at AnooYoo, a company that markets and creates beauty and age-defying products, Jimmy experiences the execution of his mother: Crake saves him from his grief (Jimmy's new job is now creating the ad campaign for the BlyssPluss Pill, a medicine that promises to revert aging); Crake has a vision of the future: all humans should be eliminated and replaced by the Crakers, humanoid, optimised creatures; loves Oryx*

Oryx: sold by her mother to a travelling businessman; was forced to sell flowers on the streets of an unknown large city. Later on, she was sold to someone else to participate in pornographic movies. A fan bought her from the moviemaker and she moved to San Francisco where she was found in a locked garage. Crake saw her on a television newscast and decided to request her through the Student Affairs Office at his school. She later went on to work for Crake; served as the first human contact for the Crakers. She haunts Snowman posthumously and the Crakers remember her as a lover of nature; loved both Crake and Snowman/Jimmy and didn't believe that Crake was the "bad guy" because he only tried to realize his vision of a better world

Main Topics in "Oryx and Crake"?

The general topics in the novel are chimeric experimentation (as Crake has the vision of a "better" world, he "invents" the Crakers) and the aspect of hubris (Crake "plays God" concerning his creation of the "Crakers")

Computer games / the media; genetic engineering; overpopulation; outer beauty; advertising … etc.

Technique extrapolation:

When talking about science fiction, the term extrapolation means the expanding or widening of scientific factual knowledge; at the centre of the story are foreseeable technical, social or other developments and the plot is around it → Gattaca: method of PDG (prenatal examination method) is at the centre of the plot