**Robert Scheer**: Hi, this is Robert Scheer with another edition of “Scheer Intelligence.” And in this case–I always say the intelligence comes from my guests; in this case, I’m saying it with great respect and awe. My guest is Noam Chomsky. And actually, this is my first real encounter with this man. But I obviously, as many people throughout the world, know him through his writing. …

And I want to begin with an intellectual question. And that concerns a letter that Aldous Huxley wrote to Orwell on the occasion of the publication of *1984*, and they were–this was a post-World War II publication, in the late forties, and [Huxley] had written *Brave New World in 1931*. … And I hope everyone listening to this is, obviously, familiar with these books. One, Orwell’s, is very bleak–totalitarian, sadism and so forth of the totalitarian state; and Huxley presents a view that is also a reflection of the work that Noam Chomsky has written about the advertising society, the manipulative society, the consumer society. Manufacturing Consent, the drug effect of sports and consumerism, lulling people into acceptance. And in his letter to Orwell, and by an accident of history, Huxley had been, in 1917, Orwell’s French teacher at Eton, and knew him. And the publisher had sent it to Huxley thinking Huxley would just embrace it. And Huxley said some nice things, but he said: **I think you missed the point; it won’t be so overt, because the ruling classes that want to hold on to their power will find that more subtle, manipulative means much more effective.** That was Huxley’s rejoinder to Orwell.

Now, your own work has sort of talked about all of it. **And when I look at the current situation in the United States now, it seems to me we have an amalgam of these two totalitarian, dystopian models emerging.** We, in the words of Neil Postman, we amuse people to death, we distract them; in your writing, you’ve talked about those distractions. But we’re also a militarized state. We have punitive surveillance, and we use the espionage law. We have the boots on the ground; we have [military] 800 bases.

So take it from there. Which–I think we can start with the assumption we have to be concerned about a dystopian future. **Which** [dystopian] **model do you see emerging?**

**Noam Chomsky**: Actually, I could add a third one. The first of this series of dystopian novels was Zamyatin, his book *We*, around 1920, Russian, gave a very vivid picture of a dystopian society that kind of amalgamates the kinds of pictures that Huxley and Orwell were developing. But we are very clearly moving to a tight surveillance society. There’s interesting work on this: Shoshana Zuboff, whose work you’ve probably seen, a Harvard professor, has a book called, I think, *Surveillance Capitalism*, which is about the techniques that are being developed to influence, control behavior, control people through the use of modern technology.

So as I’m sure you know, when you drive a car, the car is picking up a ton of information about you, going back to the auto maker to some central source, we don’t know exactly where. And so if you’re driving down the main street in Tucson, where we are now, and the information that’s been collected indicates that you like Chinese restaurants, then if you’ve got the right kind of gadgets in your car there’ll be an ad saying, you know, a half-mile from here there’s a Chinese restaurant you might like. And this is not just being used to flood you with information, but also to control you.

So, for example, the insurance companies are observing what you’re doing, if you’ve got your car wired up right. And if they see you go through a traffic light, they can send you an instant message saying you better be careful or you’re going to raise your insurance rates. They can even get to the point of locking your car, you know. But there’s a combination of sort of punishment and shaping, trying to direct you in certain directions. You see it every time you look something up on Google, you know; then you get a bunch of things saying you’d like this, or wanted to do this, and so on.

All of this goes, is moving on to controlling people at work. So by now, there’s the beginning–actually it began in Sweden, but it’s now expanded here–of placing chips in working people with an inducement. If you agree to have a chip inserted then you get, you know, free access to the coffee machine, and you can do all these interesting things, so people do it. But it also controls your actions. Like if you’re in an Amazon warehouse, they already have systems–which is backbreaking work–they’ve worked out the quickest routes between this spot and that spot.

And if you’re one of these people racing to try to keep up with a schedule, and you deviate from the route, you get a discredit immediately. You get an instant warning if you take off a little time to say hello to a friend, you get a warning. UPS is using it to control truck drivers. So if you back up when you shouldn’t have, you get a warning. If you stop for a cup of coffee when that wasn’t on your schedule, you get a warning. They’ve, in fact, they claim they’ve increased efficiency; these people internalize all this, and you race to keep to the commands, and they can claim they can now have more deliveries with fewer drivers, and so on.

This is being–the kind of model towards which society is moving is already illustrated to a substantial extent in China, where they have very heavy surveillance systems–cameras, you know, the devices that keep track of you, and so on. And you get a–they have what they call a credit system, social credit system. You get a certain number of points, and if you, say, jaywalk, violate a traffic rule, you lose points. If you help an old lady across the street, you gain points. Pretty soon all this gets internalized, and your life is dedicated to making sure you follow the rules that are established. This is going to expand enormously as we move to what’s called the internet of things. Meaning every device around you–your refrigerator, your toothbrush, and so on–is picking up information about what you’re doing, predicting what you’re going to do next, trying to control what you’re going to do next, advise what you do next. And in a way, Huxley was kind of right. People may not see it as intrusive; they just see it as that’s the way life is, the way the sun rises in the morning.

**RS**: Well, go further than that: they define freedom as consumer sovereignty. And they think of having choices about shoes to buy or the best bargain–that’s what Amazon specializes in–is a very shriveled notion of freedom. Because if you actually think of political freedom, or social activism, or being involved in the moral life of your community, then you will be a little wary of this information being out there. But I just want to make one point about this. What Edward Snowden revealed more than anyone else–and something I think you would be very familiar with, being at the sort of center of a lot of this technology at MIT for so many years–there’s a close connection between what the private sector can get and what the government has. And Snowden’s great revelation was that there’s no wall between Google and Amazon and the government. In fact, we now know Amazon is developing the cloud to keep all this information for the government, for the CIA, for the intelligence agencies.

So getting back to these dystopian models, we actually have the situation where people, in the manner of Huxley, give up their information because they’re taking the drug, consumerism, or whatever it is. But we also have the Orwellian image of Big Brother knowing everything, because we know the NSA and the CIA and every other agency has gotten all this information from Google. And so the question I want to put to you, is this the end of time for our species?