

RESEARCH · COMPANION ESSAY

# The Periscope

By John F. Long · May 2026

You are inside a submarine.

The submarine is the algorithmic feed. The screen is the porthole. The porthole shows you other people inside their own submarines. None of you are looking up.

The submarine is comfortable. The engines hum. The walls scroll. The captain, whichever captain you have selected, assures you that everyone around you is doing well, that the territory above is hostile and uninteresting, and that the next port is just below the next swipe.

You are not driving.

This essay is from the periscope.

What the periscope sees is the actual territory. Time is being captured. The hours that should belong to your life are being absorbed by labor under conditions you do not control, while productivity per worker stands at a historic high. Ground is being captured. Land has been converted into financial instruments owned at scale by capital pools you cannot access. Voice is being captured. The means by which citizens used to reach each other has been routed through curation systems run by a small number of corporations. Currency is being captured. The medium of exchange has been re-monopolized through surveillance infrastructure built into every transaction.

These four are the material preconditions of citizenship. Each is undergoing active capture in 2026. The captures look like progress to the people inside the submarine. They are not progress. They are the architecture of an invasion of autonomy that is happening to everyone with a screen.

The submarine is engineered to prevent the seeing. Engagement metrics, infinite scroll, dopamine architecture, the social comparison machine. They are engineered to keep your head pointed at the porthole instead of the periscope. Submerged is profitable for

the operators. Submerged is uninformed for you.

Once the captures are seen, they cannot be unseen. That is the property no submarine can be engineered to prevent.

This essay does not recruit you. It does not lead you. It does not require your agreement. It returns the seeing, and after the seeing the decisions are yours.

The periscope is not a rejection of the submarine. The submarine is not going away, and most of its functions are useful. You can have a place in the feed and a life outside it. The walks and the scrolling. The dinner conversations and the threads. The dialogue and the broadcast. The presence and the porthole. Both. The point is to keep enough watch above the waterline that you remember which one is which.

Some readers, after the map, will choose to contribute. They will work in their own region, in their own field, on their own scale, building parallel infrastructure where the captured infrastructure has failed. Local analysts the consolidators cannot match. Town committee members holding zoning meetings on Tuesday nights against developers with capital pools out of state. Writers grinding their own lenses for their own communities. Builders building.

Some will choose to escape. They will recognize that their current arrangement of time, ground, voice, and currency is captured beyond what they can contest from where they stand, and they will move. Geographically. Financially. Vocationally. The escape path has been the move of millions of people across centuries when conditions in one place stopped being navigable. The map clarifies what to leave and what to look for.

Some will choose to protect. They will recognize that they have specific assets, relationships, and obligations that need defending against the captures named, and they will adjust position. Diversify exposure. Strengthen local ties. Hold ground deliberately. The protection path is the steady-state response of a citizen who has assessed the terrain and decided where to make the stand.

Contribution. Escape. Protection. To each their own response, based on ability, interest, currency held, land owned, position in the local society, life stage, and the obligations already theirs. The map does not prescribe the response. The map enables the choice.

To know the map is to be able to make a decision, and a series of decisions, grounded in actual topography rather than the captured surface that has replaced it.

((you are here))

Knowing where you actually are is the precondition for choosing where to go next. The submarine cannot give you that. The periscope can.

The work of this body of writing is to grind the lenses. The work of the reader is to look through them. The work after the looking is yours.

The submarine will continue to run. Most passengers will continue to ride. The captains will continue to assure them that the territory above is hostile and uninteresting.

Some will lift the periscope.

---

#### ABOUT THE WRITER

John F. Long writes from Newport County on the South Coast of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. MPA, Roger Williams University. Two years of doctoral coursework in higher education administration at UMass Dartmouth. The practice underneath the writing is real estate ([johnlong.realestate](http://johnlong.realestate)) and verification infrastructure ([longfamilyarchive.com](http://longfamilyarchive.com)). The writing sits at [johnlong.io](http://johnlong.io) as the canonical surface for the body of work on citizenship and its material preconditions.

The body of work is structured as a quartet of citizenship surveys (time, ground, voice, currency), with [The Periscope](#) as the catalyst essay, [The Map](#) as the compressed survey, [The Absent Presence](#) as the meta-frame, and [Acting in the Cracks](#) as the applied note. The full reading order is at [/the-index](#).

Reader correspondence is welcomed; see [On Correspondence](#).