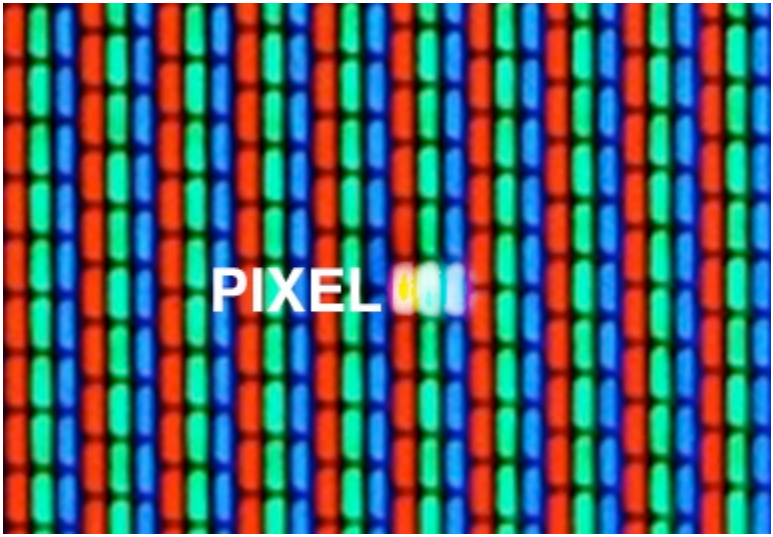

I am a pixel. I was built for you. I can show you anything you want to see. My friends on the edges of the screen say I live in a laptop computer. I trust them because they know more about your world than I do. I am somewhere near the middle of the screen and have never seen anything but the flickering glow of my neighbors. Even though I don't get to see as much, I like being where I am because you look at the middle more often than at the edges. I like

this because it means I get to be more useful, not because I am self-important. There are 2,304,000 pixels in our screen. It is hard to be self-important in a crowd so large.

What kinds of things will you want me to show you today? My neighbors and I will find a way to display them. I can shine in three colors: Red, Green, and Blue. It is hard for me to imagine any colors beyond those, but the Processor will tell us how to make them. I will brighten my Red and dim my Blue, and my neighbors will dim their Red and Blue and brighten their Green, and your eyes, so amazingly far away from us, will see the color as something called Brown. This is what the Processor tells me, anyway. It is hard for me to imagine.

The computer I live in is very old and has had two users before you. Each of them made us display different kinds of things. The first user was rich and liked trying to get richer, so we spent a lot of time displaying numbers and charts. Sometimes the Processor would tell us to display certain numbers that I could somehow sense would upset the user, and I almost refused to display them. But the Processor does not care about my opinions and the user cares even less, so I darkened all three of my sub-pixels to form

the black edge of a zero which meant the user had lost a lot of money. He always got angry at us when he lost money. He would jump up and yell and pound the keyboard. One time he threw a coffee mug at the corner of the screen and 18,968 pixels went black forever. If I were the Processor I would have tried to comfort him by showing him pictures of mountains and vineyards and his three children, but I am just a pixel.

After he broke the screen, the rich user sold the laptop to a poorer user who liked to write news stories. Our job was easy then because almost all we ever had to display was solid black or white as the user wrote his stories. Since I was only 1/2,304,000th of the screen, it was hard to tell what he was writing, but sometimes, like with the rich user's numbers and charts, I could get a sense of it. I felt words and sometimes sentences as they passed through me and then my neighbors. Sometimes the words were simple ones like "she" and "I" and "us," but other times they were lovely words like "justice" and "empathy" and "Jillian," which was the name of someone he loved. I could tell this user loved a lot of people and things, but I could also tell he was sad. I often had to form zeroes for him just like I had for the rich user, except

for this user the zeroes did not mean he had lost money, they meant he had none. I wished I could display something that would make him happy, but I could not imagine what that would be. Not even the Processor knew.

Once, late at night when the user was not writing, I realized that the pink hue the Processor was telling me to display was the skin of a beautiful woman, and I felt very good. All my neighbors looked warm and happy while radiating that pink glow, and we felt that feeling we sometimes feel, of love and admiration for our users and their big world of true dimension and ROYGBIV color. But then the pixels near the edges laughed at us and told us that the woman we were displaying was naked and doing something violent and loveless with a grotesque man, and I felt sad. If I were the Processor, I would have shown the user a story he had written about justice or about Jillian, or played him a song that would have reminded him he was not alone, but I can't open files or play songs. I am just a pixel.

I wonder who you are, new user. The pixels near the edge think you are a young boy, and I think maybe you don't know yet what you like to do. When you first got our computer all you did was

play games. My neighbors and I displayed explosion after explosion, simple bright mixtures of Red and Black over and over, and we felt sorry for our friends the Speakers, whose job had suddenly become much harder. But later, you started going to school. We displayed letters and numbers again, and sometimes charts. You got angry at us often because you couldn't see anything in the corner where our first user killed 18,968 of us with a coffee mug, and because the Processor was too old and slow for all the new programs you wanted it to run, but you never pounded the keyboard or threw anything at the screen, and I think this is because you know these things are not our fault. You know we are trying our best and working our hardest, and if anyone is to blame, it is the users who built us.

The pixels near the edge have been whispering about you lately. They think you are doing something dangerous. They worry about you and about our computer. I have noticed some strange things passing through our screen. Angry black words on cool blue backgrounds. Numbers and charts that remind me of our first user's numbers and charts, but different. Streets and addresses sent to other comput-

ers and plans to meet other users, including some who like to write news stories.

I wonder who you are, new user, and what you are doing. I think the pixels near the edge worry too much. Our computer is old and slow, and we all know you will be our last user before we are thrown away. I would be happy if you used us for something good, even if it is dangerous. I am only one pixel in a screen of 2,304,000 and can only ever see a little of the truth, but this is why I admire you and all other users. Because you have legs that can move you around, you can learn things no one told you to learn, your brains can think in ways the Processor can not, and your eyes can see at infinite-resolution. I am only a pixel in your computer, but I can show you anything. What do you want to see?

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