

Excerpt from Eva Berger's Book Context Blindness

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Excerpt from Eva Berger's *Context Blindness*

This excerpt is from Chapter 6 - No Sense of Context: Mobile, Data, Sensors, and Location found on pages 67-68 of *Context Blindness: Digital Technology and the Next Stage of Human Evolution* by Eva Berger and published by Peter Lang of New York in 2022. It is published here with the permission of the author and the publisher:

Social media are only one culprit of our context blindness. We reveal what we like, where we are, and what we are looking for through them. However, they are one of the various contextual technologies that are essential to what Scoble and Israel (2014) enthusiastically call the Age of Context. These include mobile, sensors, data, and location, and they are at the heart of this chapter.

Our blindness did not begin with these technologies. Traffic lights, for example, is a much older technology that controls human behavior as we delegate our decisions to them, and they regulate when we go and when we stop. We do not activate judgment, and we respond to the lights automatically. As it turns out, this leads to more, not fewer, accidents.

I live on a busy intersection in Tel Aviv and have witnessed probably dozens of accidents from my window throughout the years. I have not really counted, but from my general observations, I can say with a pretty high degree of confidence that the number of accidents or almost-accidents is the lowest when the traffic lights break down for a few hours. The honking will become impossible, and some of the curses among the impatient Israeli drivers may be heard all the way up to my third- floor window. But as furious as they may be, drivers are immediately more careful; they slow down more and pay closer attention as they try to make it through the busy crossing.

Without traffic lights or signs (and, apparently, without the swearing either), some places in the world have been experimenting with woonerfs— streets or squares where cars, pedestrians, and cyclists share the roads without the traditional safety infrastructure of lights, stop signs, curbs, painted lines, and pedestrian crossings to guide them (Jaffe, 2015). With all of these gone, everyone becomes more alert and focused. Vehicle speed automatically decreases, but there are fewer standstills. The number of deaths and serious injuries decline as traffic lights are replaced with common sense (BBC Staff, 2012).

Woonerfs are the exception. The leading trend is in the opposite direction: more automation rather than the use of common sense and situational sensitivity or context- reading on the part of humans. Tech giants such as Google, Uber, and Apple are using AI to create self- driving vehicles. These can understand their environments and navigate roads under different conditions, situations, or contexts, including the context of the emotions and cognitive states of the passengers and their interactions with each other. Hyundai Kia, for example, introduced in 2019 the Real- time Emotion Adaptive Driving (R.E.A.D.) technology. R.E.A.D. is an AI- powered interactive cabin that uses cameras and sensors to read passengers' facial expressions, heart rate, and electrodermal activity and then reacts and adjusts itself to their emotional state (Dickson, 2019).

We are losing our sense of direction and spatial context to navigation technology generally, and not only to self-driving cars. Spatial memory, spatial orientation, and mental mapping involve the hippocampus, and research shows that depending on GPS to navigate may negatively affect brain function, especially in the hippocampus (Gonzales- Franco et al., 2021).