

From “The Age of Solastalgia” by Glenn Albrecht

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The built and natural environments are now changing so rapidly that our language and conceptual frameworks have to work overtime just to keep up. Under the intertwined impacts of global development, rising population and global warming, with their accompanying changes in climate and ecosystems, there is now a mismatch between our lived experience of the world, and our ability to conceptualise and comprehend it.

No longer is the “wisdom of the elders” relevant to how we should live in the here and now, and this loss of historically informed knowledge has implications for social cohesion.

I experienced the connections between mental health and changes to a once predictable and loved home-environment when examining the impact of open-cut coal mining in the Upper Hunter region of NSW. My own eco-biography, the seminal influences in my life that have influenced my feelings about the natural environment, had attuned me to the importance of a positive “sense of place” in people’s lives, and to the significance of what the geographer [Yi-Fu Tuan](#) called “topophilia”, or the love of place and landscape.

From the 1980s onwards, under the combined impacts of coal mines, power station pollution, and persistent drought, the people of the Upper Hunter were suffering from a form of chronic distress that seemed to me to be the opposite of topophilia. Their relationship to their home environment had turned bad.

By the late 1990s the extent of open-cut coal mining in the Upper Hunter was in excess of 500 square kilometres and had changed the landscape in ways that older traditions of underground mining did not. Moreover, the length and severity of drought in eastern Australia was now arguably tied to climate change, driving natural variability into more extreme regimes.

It was this thought that inspired me in 2003 to create a new concept for the English language, one that captured this feeling of chronic distress caused by negatively perceived changes to a home and its landscape. I realised that there was no concept in the English language that adequately described the distressed state of the Upper Hunter residents. The melancholia of nostalgia (nostos – to return home) was close, but had the obvious disadvantage that these people were still living in the place they called home, so were not “homesick” in the traditional nostalgic sense.

As a result of my own background and the testimony of citizens in the Hunter region, I defined “solastalgia” as an emplaced or existential melancholia experienced with the negative transformation (desolation) of a loved home environment.

[Solastalgia](#) has its origins in the concepts of “solace” and “desolation”. Solace has meanings connected to the alleviation of distress or to the provision of comfort or consolation in the face of distressing events. Desolation has meanings connected to abandonment and loneliness. The suffix -algia has connotations of pain or suffering. Hence, solastalgia is a form of “homesickness” like that experienced with traditionally defined nostalgia, except that the victim has not left their home or home environment.

Solastalgia, simply put, is “the homesickness you have when you are still at home”.