

What has gone wrong with mitigation?

A review of the recent
decision-making on
climate change

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Introduction

The cruelty of recent summers has made one thing crystal-clear: we have permanently screwed up the stability of Earth's vegetal growth conditions. The climate system runs wild and it will unleash the full bandwidth of its variability on us.

But this book will not look ahead to that uncertain future. It may actually be more important to reflect on where exactly we might have wiped out our chances. Why? Our collective strength will be heavily tested by an unchained climate. And once bitten, twice shy! Where have we lost the wheel and how did that propagate to insufficiently far-sighted and safe emissions reduction policies despite the great amount of research, talks, and green energy efforts around it?

Seven years ago, few people realised what was actually going on. Most people were either in blinkers or suffering from bilateral blindness. All those involved? Yes, even climate scientists failed to grasp from the outset that this mega-problem – due to its potential impact and incredibly broad interconnectedness, via emissions, with almost all human activity – could never, ever be solved without enormous transformations in the way people make and trade stuff and services, and in the way people acquire and allocate reserves (capital/assets).

Transformations that would require extremely tight steering to implement them safely. You would have to face a completely different kind of regulation than the current mode of steering which consists mainly of interacting market forces (i.e. through the individual power to allocate capital). No wonder that few wanted to dive deeper into that¹,

¹ Nevertheless, the growth axiom of neoclassical economists has been (in the slipstream of *Limits to growth*) strongly criticized by Daly (1977), Kallis, and many others, recently also more consistently and wholistically in Social Ecological Economics. See Spash C., *A tale of three paradigms: Realising the revolutionary potential of ecological economics*, Ecological Economics, Vol. 169, 2020.

The reluctance to design contours for a different world order² was becoming a basic academic value, so to speak. Recently, thanks to the arrival of unforeseen climate turbulence ("*entering unexplored territory*"), some reflection³ on this blindness is emerging within science. This criticism on the current paradigm gives some new orientation, of course, but it does not transcend the academical discussion and does not penetrate nor feed the climate political discussion in parliaments and in climate activism, because it does not come up with clear outlines on how the climate bear could be tamed safely and in time by intervening in the modalities of our social-economic interactions⁴.

And so: right from the start, people failed to see a number of crucial variables of the broader context of the decision situation concerning long-term climate dynamics. Variables that no one thought to include in the mitigation debate or even to consider for a split second. But, I understood⁵ the extent to which these variables would propel global

2 Only ecofeminism (Shiva, Mies, Lehar) came up with much broader proposals early on, and called for an egalitarian, collaborative society. See Shiva V., *Staying alive: women, ecology and development*, London: Zed Books., 1988.

3 See the call for more divergent thinking and social imaginaries (i.e. collective images of how we might live) in the article of Stoddard I., Anderson K., et al, *Three Decades of Climate Mitigation: Why Haven't We Bent the Global Emissions Curve?*, Annual Review of environment and resources, vol. 46, 653-689, 2021.

4 Scientists are advisory. They function purely as mercenaries of the powerful (governments, corporations, NGOs), keeping their decency according to the values that apply there. And so: they lay low. Added to that: They do not realize (because cannot realize) that it is 'reason' itself that served them this potion (i.e. the mitigation fiasco). Brain functions that operate too isolated – that is: without strong connections to strongly developed feelings i.e. without deep and broad rooting of concepts in masses of impression fields constantly supplied by inner and outwardly directed sensors – are (just like AI) not exactly recommendable to prevent us ending up in precarious situations nor to escape from such situations. Such thinking has insufficient inner guidance (prioritization via consistent and strong values), and is therefore insufficiently agile. It digs in where it should distance itself in order to face the problem area much more broadly.

5 Why didn't those aspects get away from me? Presumably because of the simple fact that experience teaches, not to run the wrong way and to look damn good. I spent a lifetime in situations of social strife and envy in trade and communal con-

warming – triggering permanently an insatiable thirst for energy in our mutual dealings – and how difficult they would prove to remedy, even with powerful technological solutions.

I am talking about core axioms of our coexistence., i.e., about structural variables. Like the degree to which a society leaves everyone's accessibility to the necessities of life to be fought out between each other. But also many others like the degree of labour specialization, alienation, centralized regulation of care and decency, and the speed of innovation and reorganization. However, the way in which all these variables caused the collective inability (collective impotence) of the recent decades to nip climate change in the bud before it could spiral out of control, is quite complicated. Their interdependence and interaction is not easy to comprehend. And so the dynamics (state trajectories) that can be generated by their interplay can't be seen through one two three; certainly not along mono-disciplinary reasoning, nor by the loose rounds fired off in social media communications.

Moreover, that broader look was avoided because everyone already sensed from afar that it would lead her/him to conclusions of a quite uncomfortable and very undesirable⁶ nature. And so everyone stayed put in their own compartment and refused to climb up to the edge to see the bigger picture and to connect the dots.

But I had to, because the grass was wilting and the circumstances in my agricultural practice were beginning to creak, growl and threaten. So in between daily work I wrote articles in order to specify a more

flicts on the one hand, and wrestling with life and death of livestock and crops in daily farming on the other. More importantly, in all those confrontations, I always looked for solutions on my own (without much involvement of specialists) with all those involved. So had to formulate the situations in comprehensible words and coherent argumentations, consider options, and adjust the implementation while evaluating. In this way one can slowly but surely develop quite valid abstract frameworks about complex socio-economic-ecological operational fields full of feedbacks and non-linear connections.

⁶ Because it is contrary to the current orientation of most people, which is toward more convenience and a wider range of their consumption moves.

complete version of the rather complicated story⁷, and breathe new life into the ongoing discussion. The interesting thing is that each of the articles in this book was a response to both a specific context of public debates, reports, conferences, decision-making and planning of national and international bodies, and to unfolding climate events. Each article was prompted by an occurrence in that context like for example the wild fires in Australia, the Davos meetings, national climate plans, or ingenious adaptation and mitigation proposals (of the IPCC), or specific criticisms.

This book follows the articles' order of publication⁸. Not that each article strictly builds on a previous article, but they do overlap and have more or less provoked each other.

Each article brings together a number of positions, and integrates the

⁷ More interrelated and more complex In terms of economic, ecological, sociological and psychological scope. In the past, when young, I participated in a social systems research group (at Radboud University) where I learned to build and simulate a number of holistic, multi-causal, non-linear models about social-economic dynamism according to systemic and cybernetic principles. I even sat at a table with Dennis Meadows once (at Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 1973). It was a conversation between him and some systems scientists about how more social variables could be built into the first world model. The latter did not happen, by the way.

⁸ Note: without the financial help of the Afwendbaar Group and the continuous stream of German, English, French, and Spanish articles, news items, and actualities concerning scientific research, climate activism, and global climate dynamics that Drieka (pseudo of Hanne Walter, member of Afwendbaar) did send me, this consistent stream of articles would not have seen the light.

About the publication of these articles: All articles were published in three languages on the website *climate-clues.nl* of Afwendbaar. Some were also published on the Internetwork for Sustainability (*insnet.org*). And most were published in Dutch by the editors of *Duurzaamnieuws* (*duurzaamnieuws.nl*).

In addition, all articles were sent (by the Afwendbaar Group) to about 2900 groups and individuals worldwide who were closely involved in the climate problem, in activist, political or scientific ways. Sometimes this resulted in critical feedback. Those inputs from different perspectives contributed to the vivid and varied nature of the articles. The longest article of this book (*Discussing survival*) for example, was shaped entirely by discussions with Ann of XR Hackney. This article was, and still is, widely read on the internet.

response into one argument about the core issues that I address to broaden the perspective on the situation. In retrospect, it is easy to see how I tried in different wording each time to include the themes that, in my view, are missing in the climate debate, linking to discussions that were held on that question in various forums. Repeated attempts, in fact, to bring some regulatable variables (levers) into the climate debate with which the destabilization of climate dynamics could be reversed.

In that sense, this book gives a unique insight into how both scientific and public debate unfolded and developed over the last seven years, driven by context, across the ever higher waves of extreme climate events, opinions, models, and plans.

Jac Nijssen, September 2025