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By Clive Hamilton ¹ Guardian

In August 1883 the painter Edvard Munch witnessed an unusual blood-red sunset over Oslo. Shaken up by it, he wrote in his diary that he "felt a great, unending scream piercing through nature". The incident inspired him to create his most famous work, *The Scream*.

The sunset he saw that evening followed the eruption of Krakatoa off the coast of Java. The explosion, one of the most violent in recorded history, sent a massive plume of ash into the stratosphere, turning sunsets red around the globe. The gases emitted also caused the Earth to cool by more than one degree and disrupted weather patterns for several years.

The cooling effect of large volcanic eruptions has been known for some time. A haze forms from the sulphur dioxide spewed into the upper atmosphere reducing the amount of solar radiation reaching the Earth. It's estimated that the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991 – the largest since Krakatoa – cooled the Earth by around 0.5°C for a year or more.

Now, a powerful coalition of forces is quietly constellating around the idea of transforming the Earth's atmosphere by simulating volcanic eruptions to counter the warming effects of carbon pollution. Engineering the planet's climate system is attracting the attention of scientists, scientific societies, venture capitalists and conservative think tanks. Despite the enormity of what is being proposed – nothing less than taking control of Earth's climate system – the public has been almost entirely excluded from the planning.

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