**Film studio** from **Oscar-winning director** aims to **stir up** ‘**populist anger**’ over **climate crisis**

Yellow Dot Studios produces **short-form videos** to inform with **‘genuine, righteous anger**’ and ‘**laugh-out-loud comedy’**

The ad opens on **a bucolic mountainscape**, a lush, ascending piano run playing in the background. **Gauzy clips** from **nostalgic midcentury auto ads** fill the screen. “See the USA in your Chevrolet,” 1950s diva Dinah Shore sings.

But this isn’t your **average car advertisement**. Soon, the title track from Singin’ in the Rain begins to play, and scenes of cars burning amid wildfires and filling with water in floods start rolling. **The once rollicking music** becomes **somber**.

[**This commercial**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3ZA76dttys&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fyellowdotstudios.com%2Fcar-commercial-419%2F&source_ve_path=OTY3MTQ&feature=emb_imp_woyt)is the latest production from Oscar-winning director Adam McKay’s climate-focused production company Yellow Dot Studios. [Launched](https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/digital/adam-mckay-climate-content-studio-yellow-dot-1235483357/) last year, the non-profitstudio produces short-form videos aiming to **push back on climate disinformation**.

**The parody, which highlights the role fossil fuel-powered cars play in global warming, employs a darkly humorous tone, verging on preachy but with a slight wink.**

“The car commercial, it makes you a little bit angry, it makes you a little bit scared,” Staci Roberts-Steele, managing director of Yellow Dot Studios, said. “All of those types of emotions, I think, are really what fuel people to take the next step … on climate.”

The style is characteristic of Yellow Dot’s videos, which are distributed via YouTube and social media. Other recent projects include a [collaboration](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0O95kvMKPeQ&t=3s) with I Think You Should Leave comedian Tim Robinson, and a [weekly short-form series](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn6NAGorSHE) that parodies an oil company in the style of The Office.

Another January video parodies the television show **Game of Thrones,** featuring actors from the program and Rainn Wilson from The Office. Wilson plays a climate scientist brought in from the future to warn **the court of** Westeros – a **kingdom** in the show – about the dangers of “big oil”.

“I always thought that the **denialism** that **hung over** Westeros about the fact that ‘winter is coming’ was equivalent to the denialism of the US regarding climate change,” Wilson told the Guardian, referencing the program.

“**Extreme weather events equal the white walkers.** And what better moment to **showcase this stupefying absurdity t**han when Cersei is shown **the actual zombie** (science) and still would rather fight her same old battles. I just hope that we can save King’s Landing before it burns to the ground.”

McKay sees Yellow Dot’s rhetorical style as a sort of secret weapon, he told the Guardian.

**“The fossil fuel companies … can’t create stuff that makes you laugh out loud,” he said. “They can’t create stuff that makes you feel genuine, righteous anger.”**

**Many climate-focused communicators** also fail to draw on this range of emotion, McKay said, instead **using polite, sanitized language and relying on scientific arguments**.

**“A very gradual change as happened over the last, let’s call it 40 years roughly, with the rise of neoliberalism with money and big capital fusing itself to movements, culture, politics, news media,” he said. “It creates this kind of professional language that’s devoid of a lot of populist energy … of anger, sadness, laugh-out-loud comedy, absurdism.”**

Yellow Dot is an attempt to **fill that communications void**, he said. Conceived while McKay was working on his2021 film Don’t Look Up, an[**unsubtle climate allegory**](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/jan/08/dont-look-up-four-climate-experts-on-the-polarising-disaster-film), Yellow Dot is aiming to “reclaim populist anger” – which has come to be associated with the far right – for **progressive goals**, McKay said.

The videos aren’t for everyone. Some “liberal professionals” who “don’t like us **nakedly** saying what’s going on” find the **tone off-putting,** said McKay. And one donor even **withdrew substantial funding** when Yellow Dot began to produce ads **calling out extreme wealth as a problem**, he said.

But there’s an audience for them: a recent video in which Robinson tries to help earth scientist Henri Drake **tailor his message to the public** has garnered [1m views](https://www.tiktok.com/@weareyellowdot/video/7327424051012472110) on TikTok and nearly a quarter million on YouTube. And a 2023 [spoof Chevron ad](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2XTGteritE) which was launched before Yellow Dot but served as a **blueprint** for the projec**t racked up more than 4.5m views in 24 hours alone**.

Yellow Dot isn’t the only effort to **counter fossil fuel messaging with comedy**. This week, the [anti-gas non-profit Gas Leaks Project](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/oct/20/gas-leaks-horror-movie-climate-change-campaign) launched [Hot and Toxic](https://hotandtoxic.com/), a [parody](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/gas-stove-climate_n_65df8aabe4b0e4346d54c1ca) about **the marketing of gas stoves**. Last fall, the non-profit media organization Fossil Free Media[**unveiled a series of billboards**](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/aug/29/billboards-oil-climate-crisis-phoenix-austin)  featuring maps of broken temperature records which read: “Brought to you by **Big Oil**.”

“I think that this is an interesting **tactic** to be used to motivate anger,” said Dana Fisher, American University **sociologist** and author of the recent book Saving Ourselves: From Climate Shocks to Climate Action.

Fisher’s research has found that **outrage** over experiencing climate disasters can motivate people to join climate protest movements. It’s possible that media projects like these could, too, she said, but “it would be great to study it to actually measure the effects”.

Some of Yellow Dot’s videos have highlighted PresidentBiden’s carbon-cutting policies. A [May video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j56ctXwGqyk) features comedians June Diane Raphael and Casey Wilson drinking wine and discussing the benefits of the 2022 **Inflation** Reduction Act, which offers tax benefits and incentives to adopt **renewable energy and electric vehicles**. (“I thought that Inflation Reduction Act was **bullshit** like everything else in DC,” remarks Wilson. “A lot of it is, but the tax breaks are real,” Raphael responds.)

But overall, McKay said he has been largely **unimpressed** by Biden’s climate accomplishments.

“I would say the **Biden administration** has shown no real care towards the situation we’re in,” he said. “The way they talk about it betrays the fact that they just purely view it as something to **keep an eye on for the poll numbers**.”

The most “**glaring example**” of the Biden’s climate failures, he said, is the administration’s [failure to declare a federal climate emergency](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jul/27/joe-biden-climate-emergency-peter-kalmus), which he suspects the president fears would “**rattle**” his donor base. The Biden administration **was not immediately available for comment**.

McKay saidthe response from the US and other rich countries to the climate crisis has been even worse than officials’ response to the **comet** in Don’t Look Up. In the film, the government tried to stop the comet for a time – **albeit** for the wrong reasons. But the US is moving in the wrong direction on climate, McKay said, for instance by producing [record amounts of fossil fuels](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/nov/27/us-oil-gas-record-fossil-fuels-cop28-united-nations).

**In the lead-up to a high-stakes presidential election**, many **liberal** and green groups have praised President Biden’s achievements on climate policy. The center-left **thinktank** Center for American Progress released an [analysis](https://u7061146.ct.sendgrid.net/ls/click?upn=u001.gqh-2BaxUzlo7XKIuSly0rC82o-2FFS6-2BnIx-2F7DoGYNWwIR8B4JsawasbPQtfvlZcOGbvCCZyFTSqdgI3HePmzUyCcGG9c8LkS7szOCNQvly7YZR78kcE9E4uNhxI9im2SxC4i68LrYSKxq01cS6YSwiCNk89HpJtv2ZGpOIG5UAQ0zWedrIHHxpYCjf-2BSm0PtAnTgxX_9zSeFP1w5uBM-2FrFVTZzTH7D8qX16e0hB7b1f0c81TGsENPaaIQ2nJI4iWgJqb1lGBmam4oj4-2FRMZEB3hdBv2Glm9GX4FJrFv-2B4c8IbL56GkwdVtYN-2BrrXTIZPV1-2B698L-2BI0yEAfGy4fTG-2BDmlVBv7COc39HXrw8K-2FfbBXV6dQvamZWzEqlzAzNZVFmCsvWj0vIN280wjPdU17p9TjSLdhBdogimjVa-2FnQiJAZQc3Mv2Wm2L7tyaKOpT0bPjE0cfIvcRTCK3UlxMdmuq7LQKonCqDK6X-2FxcO8udPyjnhNwMtKHbjx7qbCqHg4hOvooi52BzgdpgPGH-2F6e-2F2wwAhfw743-2FltghU1-2B90yGoq9X-2FWXo-3D) on Wednesday saying he is “**the most consequential climate president** in history”. And a **slew** of environmental organizations **endorsed** Biden [back in June](https://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/14/green-groups-give-biden-early-endorsement-00102074).

Roberts-Steele said Yellow Dot will make videos encouraging people to “vote in their best interests, [including on] climate change”. But McKay has no plans to start praising Biden in Yellow Dot videos. Powerful Democrats, said McKay, “do not respond to ‘let’s make nice’”.

**“They only respond to pressure,” he said.**