

Droplift Guide

Includes preparation, installation, and setup information

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1 Concept

What is Droplifting?

Droplifting is a term devised by Richard Holland of *Turntable Trainwreck* and *The Institute for Sonic Ponderance* to describe an activity by which one brings the product one wishes to sell into a suitable store and, without knowledge of the store owner or staff, leaves it there for customers to buy.

Droplifting as an activity assumes several important factors:

1. The "product" deposited is somewhat designed to fit in with other products. Professionally designed and packaged, it fools the store owner and customer alike into thinking it is a "legitimate" product.
2. The maker of the Droplifted object will see *no money* from the sale of the item. Droplifting is, in this way, expensive for all those involved. The consumer pays for the product, and the maker has paid to manufacture it without return. The store owner makes out, but as he is irrelevant, we needn't concern him.
3. Slipping goods into store bins requires a degree of stealth. There is no legal precedent that we know of that would establish Droplifting as legal or illegal. Getting caught Droplifting will, eventually, force a legal precedent on the activity that will most likely not be ruled in our favor.

Further explications of these factors and the conclusions they beg are in the following.

Why would I do this?

There are a number of excellent reasons. The history of The Droplift Project provides a good starting point for this kind of discussion.

Droplift began in mid-1999 on an email discussion list devoted to audio recordings that included found sound, audio collage, cultural appropriation, media distortion, Surrealist detournement of corporate messages in the media, and other heady topics.

Many of the list participants were involved with sound collage from a creator's standpoint. Many of them had radio shows in which they would perform mixes of various materials, and a lively tape and CDR trade had sprung up.

The reasons for appropriating media and including found recordings have a clear precedent in the other arts, where influences and homages are part of the artist's selection of aesthetic tools. In music, however, this practice has long been considered an outlaw position.

It is no wonder, then, that the members of this list felt a certain frustration about getting their sound recordings out to a public which could appreciate them.

The typical venues for this audio art were few. Handmade editions of a cassette or CDR are wonderful one-of-a-kind objects in and of themselves, but they are time-consuming and tiring to create as well as they inhibit larger distribution of a work. Paying the price for a professional duplication of material is usually a bit high for the creatively-minded individual without a strong bank account or access to financial resources.

Online music venues, which allow an artist to post a compressed file of music for general download have proven disappointing. Instead of promoting free and marginal expression, these services have rather become stodgy, citing obtuse and untried variants of the aging copyright law as reasons to avoid the collagist and refuse his or her tracks.

The Music Industry at large, thoroughly wicked, corrupt, greedy, and slouching like a rough beast – like most corporate industries – was either uninterested in appealing to a less-than-chartbusting profit or sick from worry over the legalities that might be involved in using a snippet of sound not recorded under their own auspices in a studio.

It was looking grim.

Thus Our Project was born. Thirty participants would pool their talents and a little cash to professionally produce a compilation CD. Each participant (and several willing volunteers) would "Droplift" this disc into local CD stores – thereby creating the simultaneous "distribution" all over the world that they so craved.

Here is the point: we've hardly got every area covered. You may live in such an area. You may be able to help. This Guide has been written to offer you information and encouragement for your participation in this ongoing grassroots effort to popularize these supposedly dangerous copyright-sensitive tracks.

Of course it's better for us all if you follow these instructions and pitch in with the effort. But if you decide its simply not your style (and it may not be) then merely telling this story to all those around you helps us with the larger objectives at hand:

1. It points out to the public consciousness the sad and sorry state of the current Music Industry Establishment and the lack of encouragement to artists who are merely engaging in techniques and ideas that have been with us since the turn of the last century.
2. It may encourage discussion about the outdated copyright laws which were written at a time before any electrical innovation touched the lives of most Americans.
3. It may encourage others to do similar work, both in terms of the aesthetic and in terms of our method of distribution.

In any event, it is our sincerest hope that this Guide be of some concrete use to you.

2 Methods

A. The Disc

The actual Droplift Project Disc is freely available. You will need a few things to get started.

1. A computer
2. Internet connection – preferably a fast one.
3. A CD Burner.
4. A printer, preferably color.
5. Empty CD jewel cases, available at most CD stores.

It cannot be expressed strongly enough how satisfying it is to use these resources at your place of employment, if they are available.

Step One:

Gather all the MP3 files available at the Droplift Website. The general address is www.droplift.org, and the files are available in a download section.

Step Two:

While you are at the website, be sure to gather all the files for printing the label and covers for the disc.

Step Three:

Convert the MP3 files into AIFF files or WAV files, whichever your CD burning software prefers. There are a number of good converters you can use to do this. Not only do most shareware repositories on the web have such software, but it is found at nearly every commercial MP3 venue.

If you are on a Mac and are lucky enough to have the latest copy of **Toast** you can drag and drop the MP3 files right into the application to burn a Red Book standard CD.

Step Four:

Burn as many copies of the CD as you can stand.

Step Five:

Print out the pdf files and cut them to fit the CD case. If you have CD labels you may consider printing the label file on them and affixing it to the copies. This is entirely up to you.

When you've assembled the materials, you are ready to Droplift.

B. Choosing a Target

Droplifting is best done in a store that would not carry this disc normally.

If you went, for example, to Dave's Cool Local Record Shoppe with this disc – well, Dave would probably be cool about a small release and just might stock CDR burns of a disc for real. A simple discussion with this Dave would be sufficient to get him to carry it, perhaps even on consignment.

Droplifting is not an activity designed for such situations. If you find yourself drawn to talk Dave into taking the disc on consignment then, by all means, do not curb that urge. But it simply isn't *necessary* to Droplift in Dave's Record Shoppe.

Now, over at Megaplex Crap Record Chain Store, in the mall, we see a different story. Big corporate superstore chains are the kinds of structures that are destroying the tiny chance a small release has anyway, so they become the perfect target for Droplifting. The happy drones at a place like this would sooner wet themselves than actually make a decision about something not in the company handbook, especially accepting new music from a place other than a big corporate entertainment conglomerate.

Especially if they knew it was (gasp) on the grey side of copyright law.

A lot of people come into Megaplex Record Stores. A lot of foot traffic that just might pick up this disc in the bins if they found it. Sure, most people are looking for exactly what they just heard a million times on the radio, but someone will eventually give this disc a whirl, and those people are who we care about anyway.

Pick a store where the disc is likely to *be found*. No one gets anywhere if it is hidden.

C. Droplifting

Scope out the joint first. Can you walk in with a disc in your jacket or purse? You only need to leave *one* copy at any given Droplift Location. What do the bins look like? Do they have those long plastic cases? These are trouble, but not that *big a deal*. Check out the sections marked "D." Can you slip a copy in somewhere without being seen by staff?

After a dry run you will feel so confident you'll be ready to actually leave a copy. Slip the disc right there in the front of the pile, under "D." Let anyone see it if they look for it.

Worried? Don't be. Don't stand at the bin, gawking around, eyes darting, looking like a dyslexic turkey. Simply pull the item from your jacket, stare at it a moment as if you are considering buying it – as if you have just pulled it *from* the bin – flip it over a few times to check it out, and then refile it! Now you look just like a customer. Be sure and do some other browsing while you are at it.

D. What Happens Now?

Will they throw it away? No one knows. Different things will happen in different places.

Most likely the store employees will not see it for a while. If they do, the most likely guess is that they will assume it is part of the inventory. When they see it is not barcoded, shrink-wrapped, or placed in a long white plastic case, they may just take it in the back and perform all those operations on the disc. This is what we like to think of as *very good*.

The Droplift technique has been tried before, and our reports suggest that this scenario can and does happen. After all.... *No one expects customers to give the store a CD – they are expecting exactly the opposite.*

E. Checking Back

Yes, part of the satisfaction of having Droplifted the CD is when you check back later and see that it is either wrapped up like a "regular" product, or that it is missing. Check back at your targeted location a few days or even a week later to see what has happened. Is it still there? Excellent. Keep waiting, someone will eventually buy it.

No? It could have been tossed, and could have been bought. Ask the store personnel if they have "The Droplift Project," just like it is a "real" CD. They'll tell you. If they've never heard of it, then it was probably lost, stolen (oh the irony), or trashed. You win some, you lose some.

But if they've got it in the computer, then it means they tagged it, wrapped it, and sold it. Time to bring them another copy.

3 Conclusion

We are not doing this just to be a pack of bastards. Droplifting is a stunt, but it is a serious one.

It was born of the necessity to promote and distribute our own work. This work, however, has developed around issues of appropriation, media culture, collage, art, and copyright. The very structures we are addressing in our music are the structures we are attempting to master in this, our unusual distribution methods.

Droplift calls into question the sorry state of the Music Industry Conglomerates, who determine the kinds of sound art that can be created by threatening legal actions and outdated interpretations of law the only effect of which is to stifle free expression and criticism in mass media forms.

Droplift calls into question the distribution of a limited selection of cultural material by dominant corporate music retail giants. The sole relevant effect here is to similarly stifle new voices, especially dissenting or critical ones.

Droplift calls into question the pathetic adherence to the ancient and practically irrelevant copyright law as a standard to which an artist's work must conform. This is especially damaging to sound art works which would "quote" existing material in a way that is transformative – such as in criticism, comment, or satire - the same way that a filmmaker "steals" a shot from a master, or a writer reprints a poet's verse at the start of chapter.

Yes, it's a fun prank to pull, but it's got some serious issues attached to it. We wouldn't do anything *too* serious without a bit of fun – it's the kind of people we are. We could attach a lengthy Study Guide or somesuch, full of quotes and laws. We could fill volumes with serious commentary and opinions on the state of these issues. But we've chosen this route instead. You have this Guide, you know the prank, and you can get the CD. It is our sincerest hope that our efforts come to some notice and spur a little discussion about these matters. To do so would be to wrench us all from some concrete assumptions and get us all to think about change.

