



“Breaking the Law ...?” On the Role of Law and Legal References in the Cultural History of the Heavy Metal Scene in Styria since 1980

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Abstract: The cultural-historical perspective asks what role law played as an everyday phenomenon in people's lives. One such area in which one would probably not expect a central position of law at first glance is the scene life in the subculture of heavy metal. And yet metal has been characterized by a certain understanding of law since its early days. This article explores the question of what role law and references to law have played in the cultural history of the metal scene in Graz and Styria since 1980. On the levels of everyday social reality, socio-cultural imagination (for example on band T-shirts, flyers, record covers etc.) as well as the music itself, the topic of law had a strong influence on the formation of the specific identity and values of the Styrian metal community.

Keywords: Metal Music Studies, Heavy Metal, Graz, Styria, Cultural History, Law

I. Introduction: Law and legal references in the (Styria) metal scene¹

From the point of view of the representatives of the “cultural turn”, which has been accepted more widely in legal science for the last two decades, law is a phenomenon that shapes the world culturally – through diverse forms of legal references.² It is not for nothing that one speaks of a legal culture, i.e., an area of meaning and sense-making related to the law.³ Culture is, to put it extremely briefly, every way in which human beings endow their world with

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² Cf. on the diversity of these manifestations the book series *Gephart* (ed.), *Law as Culture*, 26 vols. (2010-2021); also, see the series *Barta/Senn* (eds.), *Kultur und Recht*, 8 vols. (2005-2013); for an innovative cultural studies-oriented approach to European law, see *Haltern, Europarecht. Dogmatik im Kontext*³ (2017).

³ See *Mankoswki, Rechtskultur* (2016); furthermore, see the journal *Rechtskultur* (*Löhnig* et al. eds.).

meaning and significance through their actions, including within the law and through law.⁴ It is about law as an everyday and cultural phenomenon. In this article, the reference to law is considered from this perspective of recent cultural history as one of the elementary foundations of the social formation of structures of sense-making and identity construction. This perspective asks how people perceived the law and oriented themselves around it, or sometimes also rejected or fought against the values they believed to be ingrained in the legal system.⁵

One area in which one would not immediately expect such legal references, but where they are of crucial historical importance, is the subculture of the heavy metal scene.⁶ This subculture, which for a long time was only associated with long hair and deafeningly loud guitar sounds, has been the subject of a discrete field of research since the 1990s: metal studies, or metal music studies. However, the field has only been explicitly labelled as such in recent years.⁷ This now global, interdisciplinary research discourse is currently in its academic institutionalization phase.⁸ The metal culture explored in it is historically shaped by an understanding of law as an assumed expression of the “bourgeois” world (understood as traditional and conservative socio-cultural orders around the metal scene), and its emergence was even dependent on this understanding of law.⁹ The cultural-historical view of the role of law and legal references allows us to better understand the foundation of metal scenes in particular.

What is today seen as the classic form of heavy metal was primarily shaped in Thatcher-era Britain.¹⁰ In this founding phase, the central protagonists of the metal movement were concerned with rebelling against the “unwritten laws” of a society that often seemed conservative, patriarchal, depriving of freedom, and even destructive to young people.¹¹ In this shared sen-

⁴ For an introduction to the cultural-historical perspective, see *Pichler*, *Metal Music, Sonic Knowledge and the Cultural in Europe since 1970: A Historiographic Exploration* (2020) 7-35; also, see *Schmale*, *Geschichte Europas* (2001); as well, see *Burke*, *What is Cultural History?*³ (2018).

⁵ See the references in note 2.

⁶ In the research discussion, since the introduction of the term “subculture”, a differentiated discussion has unfolded about whether metal should still be called a subculture today, given its strong mainstream presence. Especially in the early phase of the establishment of the metal discourse in the 1980s, the scene myth of social deviance, extremes and transgression while simultaneously establishing conservative cultural aspects were formative. When speaking of the “metal subculture” or similar here and in the following, this mixture of cultural aspects is meant.

⁷ For the state of research in metal studies, see *Brown et al.* (eds.), *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies* (2016); *Gardenour Walter et al.* (eds.), *Heavy Metal Studies and Popular Culture* (2016); *Heesch/Höpflinger* (eds.), *Methoden der Heavy Metal-Forschung: Interdisziplinäre Zugänge* (2014); *Nohr/Schwaab* (eds.), *Metal Matters. Heavy Metal als Kultur und Welt* (2012); *Kahn-Harris*, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (2007); classics of the field are considered in *Weinstein*, *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* (1991); *Walser*, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993); see also the new book series *Meta/Metal: Exploring the Complexities of Metal Cultures*, https://static.uni-graz.at/fileadmin/projekte/norikum/unigratzform/autorenteaser_metal-reihe.pdf (last visited on January 31, 2022); the central journal in the field is *Scott et al.* (eds.), *Metal Music Studies*, <https://www.intellectbooks.com/metal-music-studies> (last visited on February 15, 2022).

⁸ See *Pichler*, *Metal Music* 7-21.

⁹ See *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?” *Zur Rolle von Recht und Rechtsbezug in der Kulturgeschichte der steirischen Heavy Metal-Szene seit 1980*, Vol. 17 *Graz Law Working Papers* 2021, 1-31, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3958280 (last visited on November 3, 2022).

¹⁰ See the references in note 7.

¹¹ See *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?”, Vol. 17 *Graz Law Working Papers* 2021, 1-31.

timent of the formative metal scene, the “bourgeois” legal system in all its symbolic expressions (such as the robes and wigs of British judges;¹² the figure of blind justitia; the gavel of the judiciary; but also the formulaic, often perceived as stodgy, Latinizing language of jurisprudence) became the stereotype of an establishment from which the burgeoning subculture wanted to distance itself.¹³ In sharp contrast, the metalheads wanted to create their own “scene laws”. The “bourgeois” legal system, often equated in scene discourse with the jurists themselves, became the other from which they constructed their metal identity.¹⁴

This cultural-historical mechanism of “othering” contrasted, for example, the long-haired, usually male metal guitarist as rebel with the equally usually male judge in his robe as representative of the establishment.¹⁵ Although the climate of the Thatcher era was indeed marked by conservative and neoliberal impulses, what became decisive for heavy metal in terms of cultural history was the imaginative play that this othering allowed.¹⁶ This play was well captured in the lyrics of the Judas Priest classic “Breaking the Law” (1980), which to this day is considered by many metal fans to be an identity-forming song:

There I was completely wasting, out of work and down
All inside it's so frustrating as I drift from town to town
Feel as though nobody cares if I live or die
So I might as well begin to put some action in my life
Breaking the law, breaking the law (...) ¹⁷

Written by singer *Rob Halford* as a response to the transformations of life in post-industrial England around 1980, the lyrics describe the thoughts of the unemployed protagonist. He chooses law-breaking as a means of expressing his protest.¹⁸ The lyrics contain all the components of the particular image of the law in the founding phase of the metal scene, which was previously mentioned. The law was portrayed as the stultifying set of rules of a conservative society, and the metalheads as rebels breaking it in a spirit of liberating protest – mind you, the breaking of the law usually only took place in fiction.¹⁹ It would be a methodological

¹² See, for example, a motif of the British band Iron Maiden, in which their mascot “Eddie” was depicted wearing such a robe and acquitting a defendant: <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/originaliron-maiden-judge-eddie-1733784052> (last visited on January 31, 2022).

¹³ See *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?”, Vol. 17 Graz Law Working Papers 2021, 1-31.

¹⁴ See *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Cf., for instance, on the discourse on Islam: *J. Wintle*, Islam as Europe's ‘Other’ in the Long Term: Some Discontinuities, Vol. 101 *History* 2016, 42-61; also, see *Reuter*, *Ordnungen des Anderen. Zum Problem des Eigenen in der Soziologie des Fremden* (2002).

¹⁶ See *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?”, Vol. 17 Graz Law Working Papers 2021, 1-31.

¹⁷ *Priest*, *Breaking the Law*, on British Steel (Epic 1980).

¹⁸ This can be read vividly in Halford's autobiography: *Halford*, *Confess: The Autobiography* (2020) 12 et seq.

¹⁹ Cf. the anonymized oral history interviews #5 (March 24, 2021), #6 (May 26, 2021), and #11 (June 3, 2021) collected by the author as part of the project referenced supra note 1. The data corpus comprised twenty-two qualitative oral history interviews on the Styrian metal scene, conducted from February 2021 to January 2022. The following citations for oral history interviews all refer to the interview data collected in this project. In the following, only the number of the respective interview

mistake to equate the legal system of Great Britain with that of continental Europe or other places. However, the fascinating finding is that the distorted image of law as a purely oppressive system constructed in this way was received globally and worked everywhere.²⁰ This understanding of law circulated worldwide over the past four decades and became a central frame of reference for local metal scenes' foundation processes, which, however, had to be fitted into the local lifeworlds all over the globe.²¹

In the example that is in focus here, the history of the metal scene in Graz and Styria since 1980, this was exemplified by the fact that the first Styrian metal band Skull Breaker orientated themselves exactly on this song by Judas Priest. Key scene figures who built up the Styrian metal community in the 1980s and 1990s repeatedly refer to the song as a locus of orientation, but based on the specific circumstances in Styria.²² In this work, the role of law and legal references in the cultural history of this initially peripheral metal community will be presented and analyzed. Three main focal points are to be illuminated in which law and legal references manifested themselves or were integrated into the life of the scene. These focal points can be imagined as three partly overlapping circles.

The first of these circles is the realm of *everyday socio-cultural reality*. Like all people of modern societies, the metal scene members in Styria were confronted with the law in their everyday life from the very beginning. Be it the law for the protection of minors in metal venues, copyright in the music business or the law covering associations that supported youth centers as public places – these were vital in the scene's foundation.²³ The law was always present as a reality in the life of the scene. One had to deal with the legal framework, submit to it or find ways to circumvent it. Law was and is an everyday reality.

This necessary confrontation with the law as a given fact of life, which could not be significantly influenced, was then reflected in the second circle of *socio-cultural imagination*. How one sang and spoke about law (for example, in song lyrics or in discussions at scene events), how one imagined it (for example, on record covers or on scene flyers), thus summarized the identity and values of the metal scene in Styria.²⁴ As one member of the early Styrian metal community put it, it was about being an outlaw playfully, in terms of fashion, language and behavior, in order to be able to criticize the unwritten laws of a society that was perceived as overly conservative.²⁵ Today one would speak of empowerment. It was about imagination and scene fantasies that were shared in the internal discourse of the community.

Thirdly, law and the reference to law also manifested themselves in the *musical language*, i.e. in the musical compositions. Law and the reference to the law, namely in the form of the othering described above, was constitutively and creatively woven into local metal music from the beginning of the 1980s.²⁶ At least in the style-forming and founding phase of the Styrian

in the data corpus of the project as well as the date of recording are mentioned in brackets for the first reference; for further references, only the number is mentioned.

²⁰ See Pichler, "Breaking the Law...!?", Vol. 17 Graz Law Working Papers 2021, 1-31; also, see Pichler, Metal Music 47-56.

²¹ See the references in footnotes 7 and 9.

²² See interviews #5, #6, and #9 (April 15, 2021).

²³ See Pichler, "Breaking the Law...!?", Vol. 17 Graz Law Working Papers 2021, 1-31.

²⁴ See *Ibid.*

²⁵ See interviews #5 and #6; also, see: #2 (March 11, 2021), #11, #13 (July 6, 2021), and 17 (September 7, 2021).

²⁶ See Pichler, Living Sonic Knowledge in South-Eastern Austria: The Sound History of the Metal Scene in Graz and Styria, c. 1980 to the Present, in Bardine/Stueart (eds.), Living Metal: Metal Scenes Around the World (2022) 105-123.

scene in the 1980s, metal seems to have been unthinkable and unplayable without such legal references. Globally and locally, this musical language has found its own “legal vocabulary”, meaning a definable regularity of chords, harmonies and compositional strategies within which law could be thematized in a recognizable way and thus woven into the listening and playing of music as central practices of scene life.

The findings presented here are based on the initial results of oral history as well as discourse-analytical and musicological research on the history of this metal scene.²⁷ In the following, an explorative cross-section of these three overlapping circles will be presented (sections II to IV). From the aforementioned cultural-historical perspective, law and legal references are regarded as elements of the local Styrian cultural sense-making and identity construction. In the conclusion (section V), their role in the cultural history of Styrian metal is summarized in four hypotheses.

II. Law and legal references as everyday social reality

Building on the local pop and rock music scene since the 1950s, the Styrian metal scene has its origins in the early 1980s.²⁸ Since then, it has developed steadily for the most part, and its phases can largely be traced chronologically to the history of popular music in Europe and the global “West”. While the initial focus was on the structural foundation of the scene in the 1980s, its consolidation and pluralization took place in the 1990s. Around 2000, digitalization took hold of the metal scene and is still the defining macro-historical process today. Youth centers such as the “Insel” or the “Explosiv” in Graz, but also the “Spektrum” in Leoben, the “Bunte Fabrik” in Kapfenberg or similar centers in Deutschlandsberg and other cities, which had financial support from the government, were of fundamental importance, especially in the early period.²⁹ They were places where metal could be played, rehearsed and sometimes recorded. It is difficult to imagine a history of the Styrian scene without those youth centers.

Like every subsystem of differentiated modern societies, the Styrian metal scene has been permeated by various forms of law or had to deal with legal facts since its earliest days. Thus, the functionaries and members of the associations behind youth centers (centrally, for example, the aforementioned youth centers Explosiv and Insel in Graz, Bunte Fabrik in Kapfenberg and Spektrum in Leoben) had to deal with association law. The people running these scene institutions were forced to know about the law covering associations and to deal with it constructively. The associations became fundamental structures of the burgeoning metal scene with correspondingly hierarchical organizational forms. Thus, in an oral history interview, a contemporary witness spoke with an ironic undertone of a “bureaucratic organization of the scene”, which could already be observed at the Insel youth center at the end of the 1980s due to the organizational practices that that were required by the law:

²⁷ See *Pichler*, *Breaking the Law?*.

²⁸ See *Reumüller et al.*, *Rockmusik in der Steiermark bis 1975* (2010).

²⁹ See *Pichler*, “*Breaking the Law...!?*”, Vol. 17 *Graz Law Working Papers* 2021, 6-14.

[The scene life in the Insel youth center, P.P.] was (...) almost bureaucratic (...) So of course we (...) needed this (...) so-called Insel membership card (...) because it (...) was an association structure. That (...) just (...) worked in such a way that (...) events could not have taken place otherwise. (...) In any case, you (...) needed the Insel pass, then you got a stamp, then you went in with the stamp (...).³⁰

As a basic historical pattern it can be stated that the foundation and consolidation of youth centers as central places of the Styrian metal scene always depended on the law as an everyday reality – above all on association law, but then also on youth protection law,³¹ the regulation of the consumption of alcohol as well as drug legislation.³² In all of this – from the basic supporting organization form of these scene places (as a rule as associations) to the integration of youth and social work to the everyday life of the metal culture (for example at concerts, parties, rehearsals of bands in the youth centers, etc.) – one had to deal with the law. Exactly in this form, the Styrian metal scene in the youth centers already emerged in confrontation with the law – and hence structurally in the middle of society. The decisive factor was that law was generally experienced both as a protective and enabling space *and* as an inhibitor characterized by overregulation. This ambivalence was characteristic of the scene's founding context. The law structured the social. When asked whether contact with the law in the establishment of these scene sites was perceived as positive or negative, a contemporary witness replied:

It's definitely both (...) funding guidelines, for example (...) so much nonsense that I've read there in part (...) the funding guidelines [are, P.P.] more or less like laws (...) the civil servants all act according to (...) What is a law, what is a rule, what is a guideline? (...) Then a person [an official, P.P.] comes along (...) who wants to leave his own scent mark and invents something new [i.e., funding guidelines, P.P.], which (...) is complete nonsense (...) That's one thing [the negative about the legal experience, P.P.]. The other [the positive, P.P.] are drug protection laws, youth protection laws (...) We have always complied with them.³³

Obvious from this quote is how important the securing of maximal public funding was as a legal experience. Also, since the earliest days of the metal scene, the production, recording and marketing of music was necessarily involved in legal processes and realities around copyright, record contracts, the juridical nature of distribution processes and all other issues of

³⁰ Cf. interview #9; on analogous processes in other youth centers also #2, #3, #5, #6, and #12.

³¹ Youth protection legislation in Austria is a matter of provincial law, although there are tendencies toward standardization at the federal level. For a fairly recent overview, see <https://www.jugendportal.at/themen/jugendschutz-recht/jugendschutz> (last visited on October 7, 2021); on the Styrian legislation, cf. *Pro Libris Publishers* (eds.), *Steiermärkisches Jugendgesetz: Text, Materialien?* (2019).

³² Cf. comprehensive on statistical, legal and social information on alcohol consumption in Austria: Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (ed.), *Handbuch Alkohol – Österreich*, 3 vols. (2020), <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Drogen-und-Sucht/Alkohol/Handbuch-AlkoholOesterreich.html> (last visited on October 9, 2021); on the alcohol and drug culture in the metal scene, cf. oral history interviews #2, #3, #5, #6, #9, and #13.

³³ Source: interview #5.

the economy of the community.³⁴ In this sense, the bodies of law and legal realities that characterized these areas historically existed before the metal scene itself. Therefore, the metal subculture had to develop around them or creatively and critically integrate them. A vivid example is the history of Napalm Records, one of the largest independent metal labels in the world, the global market position of which is strategically focused only on regions (namely, being founded in Upper Styria, primarily Europe and North America), in which for the management the legal security of music property and protection against piracy in merchandize is given. The everyday experience of legal security is the top maxim of the scene economy.³⁵

This was also tangibly evident in the planning and negotiation of studio contracts, reported on by the operator of a recording studio where some of the earliest Styrian metal records were recorded.³⁶ Here, too, the focus was on the ability to plan, based on the security and protection provided by the law. At the same time, the law was also perceived in part as excessive and overly controlling – again, the everyday experience was one of ambivalence.³⁷

One musician's legal experience, which he reported in an oral history interview, is particularly illustrative. After a dispute arose in his band over copyright, naming rights and exploitation rights of their recordings, the band members resolved this dispute in a mediation-like process in which lawyers were involved on both sides of the conflict.³⁸ The law as a solution and order framework, but also its threatening power in the possible taking of legal action, were central realities of experience for the metal musicians involved. This experience of the power, rationality and order of the law, but above all the legal protection of the music that was so important to him, led the respective musician to pursue a career in law. The expertise from the study of law provided him with an "instrument of power", "because then (...) you can help yourself (...)".³⁹ Here, too, the ambivalent legal experience, oscillating between potential conflict resolution through law and simultaneous fear of the legal consequences, was the main aspect in the scene's everyday life.

As shown by these examples of Styrian scene culture, the law was an everyday reality of the metal community from the very beginning. People lived in the legal space and in the confrontation with legal references. What characterized all these experiences since the early 1980s is that the law not only meant restrictions and obligations in scene life, but also offered protection. It enabled the social structuring of the metal subculture. This was in sharp contrast to the self-image of the scene in the sense of the othering in the "Breaking the Law" myth described above. The Austrian and Styrian legal culture that existed long before was a basic prerequisite for the genesis of the scene's central locations and networks as these built on both. Thus, the metal scene, clearly visible in the Styrian example, was much more integrated – structurally and systemically – into the "bourgeois world" than its reception as well as its

³⁴ On this, cf. interviews #2, #7 (April 6, 2021), #8 (April 9, 2021), #11, #15 (July 22, 2021), and #18.

³⁵ See *Pichler*, Living Sonic Knowledge 105-123.

³⁶ Cf. interview #7; also, see #9 and #18.

³⁷ Cf. interview #7.

³⁸ See interview #4 (March 23, 2021).

³⁹ Source of quote: *ibid.*

own myths suggested. The productive resolution of this ambivalence or finding a permanently practicable way of dealing with it within the scene became main driving forces.⁴⁰ To ask how this necessary confrontation with the law contributed to the formation of the identity of the local metal scene leads to the socio-cultural imagination of law and legal references as a second circle.

III. Law and legal references as socio-cultural imagination

Imagination is one of the key notions in recent cultural history.⁴¹ In cultural history, imagination is understood to be all the ways in which people in the past endowed phenomena of their living environment with meaning and significance.⁴² Following *Achim Landwehr* and *Stefanie Stockhorst*, for example, a tree was not only a tree, but sometimes a religious symbol, a place of execution, a badge of “green” cities, or numerous other things.⁴³ In the study of the cultural imagination process, it is necessary to explore how, when, and where people endowed phenomena of the world with meaning. Law is also such a phenomenon in our world. For the Styrian metal scene, it was not only an objectively given legal structure, but a culturally effective system of practices, norms, rules, etc., which stimulated the scene members to think, speak, act and make music.⁴⁴ The confrontation with the metal scene’s own “Breaking the Law” myth as well as the protective legal realities in Styria led to endowing the law with meaning in certain ways; to imagining it socially and culturally.⁴⁵

In this cultural-historical perspective, the reference to law presented in the lyrics of the Judas Priest classic is one of the fundamental aspects of global metal culture since the song’s first release.⁴⁶ The lines that singer *Rob Halford* put on paper and recorded in 1980 expressed the atmosphere of that time. The protagonist of the song breaks the law to achieve his personal emancipation. In the process, qualities such as “conservative”, “oppressive”, “authoritarian”, and “bourgeois” were attributed to the law. As already touched upon in the introduction, this served the burgeoning metal scene as a contrasting foil in the justification of its own “scene laws”. The development of this particular value concept happened on all everyday levels of metal: in text, picture, gestures, rituals, etc. All this could also be observed in Styria, for example in scene talk at the Explosiv youth center in Graz or on early record covers.⁴⁷

Since law, as described, was not only found to be a given reality with which one had to live, but was also engaged with culturally, it became a core topic of the scene’s internal discourse. The community wanted to be free from the corset of conservative norms and values that it saw inscribed in law. They wanted to figure out and then define what was morally right for a metalhead.⁴⁸ As paradoxical as it may seem at first glance, it was precisely the confrontation with the protective character of the Austrian legal system, which had made the birth of the

⁴⁰ See *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?”, Vol. 17 Graz Law Working Papers 2021, 6-14.

⁴¹ See the references in note 4.

⁴² See *Pichler*, *Metal Music* 25-76.

⁴³ Cf. *Landwehr/Stockhorst*, *Einführung in die Europäische Kulturgeschichte* (2008) 10.

⁴⁴ See *Pichler*, *Living Sonic Knowledge* 105-123.

⁴⁵ See *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?”, Vol. 17 Graz Law Working Papers 2021, 1-31.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Halford*, *Confess* 12 et seq.

⁴⁷ Cf. interviews #1, #4, #5, #6, #8, #10, #11, #14, #15, and #16 (April 18, 2021); for concrete empirical examples, see *Pichler*, *Breaking the Law?*

⁴⁸ See *Pichler*, *Living Sonic Knowledge* 105-123; also see *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?”, Vol. 17 Graz Law Working Papers 2021, 1-31.

Styrian metal scene with its supporting networks possible in the first place, that created the space in which this imagining of the law could take place. The reliable framework of a prosperous, largely legally secure society with a state-supported cultural landscape made this possible.⁴⁹

A cultural scene space emerged in which, for example, the Graz metal community, which at first consisted largely of a few male high school students, could deal with issues such as alienation from the society that surrounded them.⁵⁰ There was criticism of authoritarian thinking, conservatism and existing remnants of National Socialist ideology. As one member of this early scene put it, they felt that the society of the early 1980s was characterized by arbitrary rules, which had also shaped the school system:

[There was, P.P.] (...) apparently the unwritten law: to just arbitrarily give a bad grade to people who (...) open their mouths too wide, maybe have an opinion (...) "Breaking the Law" [means, P.P.] break these laws, these unwritten laws that (...) disenfranchise you and (...) oppress you! (...) We were the disenfranchised and the oppressed, who felt that, so everyone from the initial scene (...) [i.e., the early Graz metal scene, P.P.].⁵¹

It is characteristic of the diagnosed ambivalence of the founding situation of this metal scene that terms with legal connotations – "outlaws", "disenfranchised", "unwritten laws" – occupied a central position in this self-description. These are not academic legal terms, but terms with legal connotations from popular and everyday culture, which scene members used broadly to reinvent themselves as metalheads.⁵² They were "outlaws" and "disenfranchised" who cultivated their new role by having long hair, wearing band T-shirts with provocative symbols and slogans, and listening to rebellious music. Simple semiotic means sufficed here:

Back then [in the early 1980s, P.P.] it was easy. You grew your hair, you then somehow managed to have a metal T-shirt and indulge in heavier music and you were (...) already the outlaw. The thing has been successful. (...) It was (...) simple. (...) You just (...) showed up, you walked around a bit, people changed sides of the street and you were the outlaw (...).⁵³

Against the background of a somewhat still strongly Catholic and conservative Styrian society, the described behavior was a semiotic breaking of these "unwritten laws".⁵⁴ In the process, law became a socio-cultural imagination, which, however, at the same time rubbed up against the everyday reality of legal security and the protection of scene activities. The existence of actual freedom allowed this critical reference to law through imagination in the first place. This ambivalence between everyday experience and imagination of the law in the sense of

⁴⁹ See *Zembylas/Tschmuck* (eds.), *Der Staat als kulturfördernde Instanz* (2005).

⁵⁰ Cf. Interviews #5 and #6; on other locations in Styria, see interviews #1, #2, #9, #11, and #18.

⁵¹ Source: interview #4.

⁵² In this respect, see *Haß-Zumkehr* (ed.), *Sprache und Recht* (2002).

⁵³ Source: interview #4.

⁵⁴ Cf. interview #11.

the “Breaking the Law” myth is still formative today and determines the “ultra-liberal” traits of the ethics and identity of this local metal community.⁵⁵ Freedom and authenticity of the metal-heads are central values.

The cultural processing of the ambivalence of law showed up on all important levels of the scene culture: on T-shirts, on record covers, on flyers, in song lyrics, in conversations between fans about the music, and finally in the music itself.⁵⁶ All of this created a semiotic space of imagining law, with the function of encoding and developing the knowledge of what metal is in Styria.⁵⁷ The fact that Skull Breaker as the first Styrian metal band was to take the Judas Priest classic as a reference point, and that this ethic of freedom and rebellion was reflected on their first concert flyers, illustrates this.⁵⁸

Such concert flyers have an important documentary memory-forming function in the metal scene: They serve to promote metal concerts as fundamental community events. At the concerts, scene members meet, construct their community and celebrate themselves and their music. The flyer, as a paper or digital index of this event announces it beforehand and preserves it afterwards.⁵⁹ Therefore, flyers also play an important role in the fans’ trophy hunt for cultural artifacts of the scene. Thus, since the 1980s, flyers created a semiotic space of the cultural imagination of law. A vivid example is the concert flyer documenting an event called “Sounds of Justice”, which took place on October 7, 2006, at the *Kulturkeller* in Gleisdorf, Eastern Styria:

⁵⁵ See *Scheller*, *Metalmorphosen. Die unwahrscheinlichen Wandlungen des Heavy Metal* (2020) 215-231.

⁵⁶ For examples, see *Pichler*, *Breaking the Law?*; also see *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?”, Vol. 17 *Graz Law Working Papers* 2021, 1-31.

⁵⁷ Cf. interviews #1, #4, #5, #6, #8, #10, #11, #14, #15, and #16.

⁵⁸ Cf. interviews #5 und #6.

⁵⁹ For this approach to a semiotic source analysis, see *Weber et al.* (eds.), *Vergangenheiten auf der Spur. Indexikalische Semiotik in den historischen Kulturwissenschaften* (2012).



Figure 1: Flyer for the local metal festival “Sounds of Justice”, (October 7, 2006), Kulturkeller Gleisdorf, <http://www.verreckattack.com/> (last visited November 14, 2022).

Both the flyer itself and photos from the event are still circulating online today.⁶⁰ Judging from the photos as well as the flyer, it seems to have been a quite normal concert event, typical for the Styrian metal community of that time. It is decisive that for the title of the evening, a term with legal reference was chosen (“justice”, to be understood as a term connected with the corresponding semantic links to the legal system). At the same time, the term has a moral possibility of interpretation. This made the evening a performance of the central cultural practices of the metal scene (live performances of bands; wearing band T-shirts; showing the metal horns gesture, etc.), in which the living of the values of the metal scene and the imagining of the reference to law merged smoothly. The point of this evening in the fall of 2006 was to resolve the ambivalence between the scene’s critical understanding of the law in the

⁶⁰ Cf. <http://www.verreckattack.com/> (last visited on October 11, 2021).

sense of the “Breaking the Law” myth and the enabling legal security as an everyday experience.⁶¹ Imagining the event together as one in which sounds of justice were central allowed precisely this.⁶²

Another semiotic and media scene level on which the imagination of the reference to law made itself felt are record covers. Considering these images as cultural-historical sources, it makes sense to start from the literal meaning of the word “cover”. Metaphorically speaking, the cover illustration “covers”, “protects”, and “envelops” the music stored on the record.⁶³ Thus, this source genre has an “enveloping” semiotic function that usually refers back to the music at the center of the scene, typically based directly on it. A cover is judged successful if it translates the atmosphere, the heaviness, and the content of the music into the visual well. Often the images are allegorizing, mythicizing, and inviting speculation, addressing the legal reference of the music and lyrics. The most prominent example on a global level is the cover of the Metallica album “...And Justice for All” (1988), which plays very directly with legal references:



Figure 2: Cover image of METALLICA, ...AND JUSTICE FOR ALL (© Elektra Records/Vertigo 1988).

Also in the Styrian metal scene, this kind of socio-cultural imagining of law in cover artwork, always connected with the values of the scene, became important since the 1980s. Thus, it can be assumed that the above-mentioned flyer referred to this album by Metallica. A vivid

⁶¹ See *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?”, Vol. 17 Graz Law Working Papers 2021, 1-31.

⁶² On this environment, cf. interview #18.

⁶³ On metal culture from such an aesthetic perspective, see *Scheller*, *Metalmorphosen* 215-231; also, see *Done*, *The Art of Metal: Five Decades Of Heavy Metal Album Covers, Posters, T-Shirts & More* (2013).

local source example is the cover chosen by the Styrian black metal band Asmodeus for their studio album “Imperium Damnatum” in 2006:



Figure 3: Cover image of ASMODEUS, IMPERIUM DAMNATUM (© Twilight Records 2006).

Already the title of the album provides legal references to the imagination. The term “Imperium”, which here was probably deliberately thought of in its original Latin sense, refers to Roman legal history, in particular to the legal powers of Roman officials.⁶⁴ Also one thinks of the concept of the “Imperium Romanum”. However, it cannot be assumed that the musicians of Asmodeus wanted to make a Roman-legal statement. It is rather about the legal associations that the language Latin, Roman history and the term “damnatum” bring with them; about the associations of the military strength of ancient Rome, the “heavy” sound of the Latin language, which for a long time was the traditional language of law.⁶⁵ The warlike fable and fantasy figures depicted on the cover with martial weapons take up this imagination. The “Imperium Damnatum” is nothing other than the metal scene, the shared cultural space of the metal community, in which the metalheads can give themselves their own laws. Here, the community holds the imperium. The imagination of law enables the scene to present itself as strong, rebellious and critical of religion. The reference to law here is also playful and based on popular myths from history, which made it all the more effective.

⁶⁴ See *Waldstein/Rainer*, *Römische Rechtsgeschichte. Ein Studienbuch*¹¹ (2014); *Harke*, *Römisches Recht. Von der klassischen Zeit bis zu den modernen Kodifikationen* (2008).

⁶⁵ For instance, see *Filip-Fröschl/Mader*, *Latein in der Rechtssprache: Ein Studienbuch und Nachschlagewerk*⁴ (2014).

Another sphere in which the imagination of law can be found in the Styrian metal community since the early days are the designs of fan and band T-shirts. T-shirts are an integral part of heavy metal culture. Traditionally offered only in black and featuring the lettering of popular bands as well as album or tour motifs, they are, along with the *Kutte*,⁶⁶ those items of clothing that make metal culture most recognizable to outsiders. When considering T-shirts as historical sources, methodological account must be taken of the peculiarities of this “vestimentary” source genre.⁶⁷ They are worn directly on the body and therefore support the embodiment of values. As clothing, they are charged with codes and norms regarding gender, sexuality, religion and morality. In such respects, they are the “closest to the body” source form and in this respect sources for the body of history of Styrian metal.

In this context, law and the reference to law appeared in similar forms as mentioned in cover illustrations as well as on flyers, insofar as these contained pictorial elements. The allegorical figures and motifs that refer back to the music at the center of culture played the decisive role. The law or the reference to the law were coded in this and linked to the values and identity of the scene. A recent example is the T-shirt that the group Darkfall created for the split EP “Death Squad”, which they released together with the Viennese band Mortal Strike:⁶⁸



Figure 4: T-shirt accompanying the split EP DARKFALL/MORTAL STRIKE, THRASHING DEATH SQUAD (Black Sunset Records 2021, photograph by author).

This example shows how in the present the imagination of law takes place. Both bands contributed pieces to the accompanying record, and they likewise share the media sphere offered by the front of the garment. Darkfall take the left half to use their logo as well as the traditional and official Styrian coat of arms of the panther and the colors green and white.

⁶⁶ The *Kutte* is a denim or leather vest with band patches and/or other accessories, usually with cut-off sleeves, worn at scene events; see *Cardwell*, *Battle Jackets, Authenticity and 'Material Individuality'*, Vol. 3 *Metal Music Studies* 2017, 427-458.

⁶⁷ *Höpflinger* uses the example of the black metal sub-scene to show how this is to be understood; see *Höpflinger*, *Religiöse Codes in der Populärkultur. Kleidung der Black Metal-Szene* (2020).

⁶⁸ Cf. *Darkfall/Mortal Strike, Thrashing Death Squad* (Black Sunset Records 2021).

Similarly, the Viennese group Mortal Strike uses the right half to display the Viennese provincial insignia. Below that, the title of the record “Thrashing Death Squad” is presented on a golden yellow banner in a typeface characteristic of the scene. The back is characterized by white script of the same wording.

Only at a first superficial glance, this seems to have little to do with law and legal references. If you consider that the Styrian panther is in essence the legal-semiotic representation of the province of Styria, symbolizing its government, its jurisdiction and its laws, you come to a different conclusion. Along with the playfully presented claims to power associated with it, Darkfall uses the state symbols to promote itself and construct itself as a Styrian metal band. This playful usurpation of the official symbols exists on the imagination of law. The panther as a symbol of law and rule is provocatively detached from its original context and placed in the context of the metal scene. In the sense of balancing the ambivalence described above, the imagination of law is also used here to construct the self-confidence and identity of the Styrian metal scene. Darkfall uses the imagination of law to express that the metal scene can and should make its own Styrian scene laws.

Based on the analysis of these examples, we can now take stock of the socio-cultural imagination of law and the references to law in the Styrian metal scene. This imagination was nothing other than a historically necessary cultural processing of the legal experience described above. The everyday experience of legal security and state support as a prerequisite for the scene’s foundation caused a cultural dissonance and a gap that opened up towards the community’s imagined outlaw identity. Thus, it became necessary to conduct a broad, if not always explicit, discourse in the metal community about law, legal reference, and morality. To distinguish oneself from the “bourgeois” and to use the traditional Styrian semiotics of law for this purpose was the core process that united all of this. As a resource for local sense-making and identity construction, law made it possible to construct the Styrian metalheads as rebels in their own sense. It is astonishing how close the fiction and factuality of law came in this process. It is especially striking to see how much the metal staging of rebellion and protest was also dependent on the “bourgeois” in the othering process. In this respect, too, metal in Styria has always taken place in the middle of society. The extent to which law penetrated into the center of this subculture can finally be seen in an examination of the music itself.

IV. Law and legal references in musical language

If so far there has been talk of a metal scene, its subculture and network, then this should not obscure that this scene cannot be thought of without the music itself. Metal culture, in all its dimensions, is always to be seen in relation to the music at its center. In some contexts, song lyrics, cover artwork, or flyers, for example, can stand on their own. But in the historical long-term view, the scene revolves centrally around the axis of the musical language of heavy metal.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For such an integral historical approach, see *Pichler, Breaking the Law?*.

In the more than four decades of Styrian scene history, this was not different. Music was the community's epicenter of sense-making and identity construction. Since Elflein's groundbreaking "*Schwermetallanalyse*" (i.e., "heavy metal analyses") we know that one can speak of metal music's own stream of tradition.⁷⁰ Since about 1970, a distinct metal musical language has emerged that characterizes this stream. Apart from musicological debates, this is relevant for the topic analyzed here, since law and legal references have also been integrated into this musical stream of tradition.

As relevant research demonstrates, metal music language has developed its own "legal vocabulary" in the form of which law and legal references have been woven into the music.⁷¹ This covers a regularity of preferred harmonies, rhythms and chords within which law is musically articulated as a theme in metal.⁷² Thus, law became audible in metal. From a global point of view, since the early 1980s there have been numerous other examples besides the Judas Priest classic "Breaking the Law" and the Metallica album "...And Justice For All" mentioned above. Songs like Anthrax's "I Am the Law" (1987), Helloween's "Heavy Metal (Is the Law)" (1985), Iron Maiden's "Sanctuary" and "Running Free" (both 1980) as well as Pantera's "Heavy Metal Rules" (1984) and albums like Watain's "Lawless Darkness" (2010) or Sarcófago's "The Laws of Scourge" (1991) made law and references to law audible in a metal way.⁷³

As relevant analyses demonstrate, the same can be said for Styria, albeit with local specifics. Bands like Blessed Virgin with the songs "Heavy Metal" and "Nightmare" in the 1980s, later in the 1990s the group Dynamite with the song "Cause They Are People" or also the internationally successful Ekpyrosis are important to mention here because they deal with law and/or legal references.⁷⁴ In the new millennium, Klynt incorporated the legal reference into their music with the album "Faustbreaker" and its title track, similar to Asmodeus, Blessmon and Python Regius.⁷⁵ Here, different focal points and conjunctures can be recognized in part than in the European and global stream of tradition, but the compositional means used were the same. The artists made use of the aforementioned "legal vocabulary" in order to integrate the reference to law, as a norm-related expression, into the compositions. It is fundamental that in this way the theme of law was linked in music with the discourse of morality and identity. In the music, law as a realm of meaning and experience and the value genesis of the metal scene audibly flowed together. This was especially important in the founding phase of the Styrian metal scene.

It could be argued that the appearance of law in music was also a form of cultural imagination, that is, it could be included in the second circle of the thematization of law. However, there are two important reasons against this argument. First, since music is the epicenter of the metal culture, it makes sense to interpret it as a separate level of legal references. Then,

⁷⁰ See Elflein, *Schwermetallanalysen*. Die musikalische Sprache des Heavy Metal (2010) 15-38.

⁷¹ See Pichler, *Breaking the Law?*; for research on the musical language of metal, see Elflein, *Schwermetallanalysen* 15-38; and also, see Walser, *Running with the Devil*; for the language of law, see Haß-Zumkehr, *Sprache und Recht*.

⁷² Cf. Pichler, *Breaking the Law?*.

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid* 5.

⁷⁴ Cf. Efthymiou, *Musikanalyse: Blessed Virgin* (2021) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author); Efthymiou, *Musikanalyse: Dynamite*, (2021) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author).

⁷⁵ Cf. Efthymiou, *Musikanalyse: Klynt* (2021) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author); Efthymiou, *Musikanalyse: Blessmon* (2021) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author); Efthymiou, *Musikanalyse: Asmodeus* (2021) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author); Efthymiou, *Musikanalyse: Python Regius* (2021) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author).

however, the main argument against it is that the language of music – as *Harris Berger* proved in his music-phenomenological research on metal⁷⁶ – causes a specific sensory form of perception in the human body, which however has not yet been fully explored. In the act of listening, and in concerts also of physically feeling the music, this perception is in the foreground. The law (respectively a representation of law) is heard and felt, not read and not seen. It is crucial that through this, at the epicenter of the subculture, legal experience, legal imagination and metal ethos became a sonic amalgam. This cannot be considered in its entirety here. However, two paradigmatic examples of analysis – one global and one Styrian – will be used to illustrate more precisely how this happened.

The global example, which will be considered first starting from *Efthymiou's* research, is “Breaking the Law”, which has already been mentioned several times.⁷⁷ It is beneficial to take a closer look at this example again, because building on the analysis of the textual and discursive levels already carried out, a better classification of the musical language can be made. Furthermore, it makes sense to start from this song, since it was received well in all metal scenes worldwide, as it were, also in Styria.⁷⁸ As *Efthymiou* explains, the reference to law in listening to the song arises from clearly comprehensible compositional strategies.⁷⁹ The powerful chorus, which contains the message (i.e., “breaking the law”), is central to the genesis of meaning. The power chord A5, which is linked to the reference to law in the chorus, is the central means of expression here. The message-focused chorus is contrasted with the verses, which differ from it in pitch and other musical parameters. The construction of the rebellious message works because the song contains only a manageable selection of chords (only six in total: C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5), which are, however, presented in the course of the song in a harmonic sequence and rhythmically variable manner. The chorus is brought into the focus of the dynamics of listening, thus enabling the meaningful reference to law in musical language. Thus, in the musical language, through the choice of expressive means – analogous to the imagination on the lyrical level – the legal system is marked as an expression of a “bourgeois” society, which the metalheads should confront through the fictitious breaking of the law. Through the worldwide listening history of the song since 1980, the image of the law, the demanded fictitious behavior towards the law and the ethos of the metal movement became a musical amalgam – also in Styria.⁸⁰

The same message focus was evident in *Blessed Virgin's* aforementioned song “Heavy Metal” in 1983.⁸¹ By the end of the 1980s, *Dynamite*, in their songs “Between Your Legs” and “Cause They Are People”, had become even more sophisticated in their use of musical language.⁸²

⁷⁶ See *H. Berger*, *Stance: Ideas about Emotion, Style, and Meaning for the Study of Expressive Culture* (2010); *H. Berger*, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz. Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience* (1999).

⁷⁷ Cf. *Efthymiou*, *Musikanalyse: Judas Priest - Breaking the Law* (2021) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author).

⁷⁸ See *Pichler*, *Living Sonic Knowledge* 105-123; also, see *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?”, Vol. 17 *Graz Law Working Papers* 2021, 1-31.

⁷⁹ See *Efthymiou*, *Judas Priest* 135-137.

⁸⁰ See *Pichler*, *Living Sonic Knowledge* 105-123; also, see *Pichler*, “Breaking the Law...!?”, Vol. 17 *Graz Law Working Papers* 2021, 1-31.

⁸¹ See *Efthymiou*, *Blessed Virgin*.

⁸² See *Efthymiou*, *Dynamite*.

The Styrian metal musicians used analogous compositional means like their idols Judas Priest or Iron Maiden. From a global point of view, it seems that musical conventions, which were also available in Styria, had emerged that rather strictly regulated how the legal reference should be expressed. It is obvious that this – a codification of authoritative musical conventions that determined the success of songs among fans – at least partly counteracted the scene's own rebellious myth.

Using the Graz-based band Heathen Foray as a second example, we will now explain in more detail how the reference to law had an effect in terms of music language at the local Styrian level. Analyses of the songs "No Mercy" from the album "Inner Force" (2013) and "Wofür ich streit" (i.e., "what I fight for") from "Into Battle" (2015) are particularly suitable for this purpose. In "No Mercy" the lyric line "my word is law" is underlaid with the same riff figure as the message of the song (i.e., "show no mercy").⁸³ From this it also becomes clear that in the Styrian metal musical language law, legal reference and value genesis became an audible amalgam. In the song "Wofür ich streit" this link becomes even clearer. Those vocal passages are deliberately emphasized in which what is necessary to "fight" for is explicitly expressed: "freedom" and "truth".⁸⁴ This was achieved by singing the message with value and legal references exclusively in passages with A as the tonal center. That this was accompanied by an even deeper embedding in the Styrian micro-context can be seen in the fact that Heathen Foray composed songs in the Styrian dialect and recently released a cover version of the folk music piece "Steirermen san very good".⁸⁵

Summing up these examples, the musical language is the third empirically tangible circle of legal manifestations in metal in Styria. The means of musical language were used to make audible the distorted image of law and the development of the scene's own ethics. Through this, the metal scene's confrontation, already analyzed above, with the ambivalence between actually experienced legal security and simultaneous criticism of the law, advanced to the musical core. The reference to law thus became an identity-forming structure of sense-making in the Styrian metal scene culture.

V. Conclusion

What has been presented in this work corresponds to the state of initial cultural-historical as well as music-analytical research in regard to the analyzed heavy metal scene. This research fits internationally into the broader discourse on the global tradition stream of metal. In conclusion, four hypotheses can be formulated at present. In order to be able to formulate these theses, the essential arguments should first be recalled.

In the course of the history of the Styrian metal community, law and the reference to law were constantly present as points of orientation for the scene's internal identity construction as well as the value concepts associated with it. In the process, three overlapping circles emerged.

⁸³ Cf. *Efthymiou*, Musikanalyse: Heathen Foray (2021) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author) 1-24.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* 31-44.

⁸⁵ See as an example in Styrian dialect *Foray*, Mei Laund, on Inner Force (independent release 2013); as a cover version from the genre of "Volksmusik", see *Foray*, Steirermen san very good (online release 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPGkjzCnCPQ> (last visited on October 10, 2021).

In *everyday experience* as the first circle (section II.), law and the reference to law were a given from the beginning as realities of experience of the metal community. People lived in the legal space and in their everyday dealings with the law. In this context, the law was not only interpreted as a restriction in scene life, but also offered fundamental protection to the development of the scene and its culture. The Austrian and Styrian legal culture that was already in place was a basic prerequisite for the genesis of the scene's central locations and networks, which can be above all illustrated in Styria by the example of youth centers.

In the second circle of the *socio-cultural imagination* (section III.), the ambivalence then manifested itself, which thus opened up between socially structuring legal security and the rebellious self-myth of the metal movement. The confrontation with this ambivalence became one of the central driving forces in the cultural history of the Styrian heavy metal community. The legal imagery (for example in lyrics, on flyers, covers and T-shirts) was nothing more than the historically necessary processing of the cultural dissonances that were forming. Thus, a broad discourse about law, legal reference and morality was conducted in the community.

The analysis of the *language of music* (section IV.) as the third circle of law and the reference to law in metal breaks new scientific ground. In the form of preferred compositional strategies, with the help of which the topic of law was articulated musically, a musical "legal vocabulary" was formed. In this way, law became audible in Styrian metal, which can be illustrated by the example of the Graz-based group Heathen Foray. The musically integral thematization of law, legal reference, justice and good morals thus advanced to the musical core of this subculture.

From the cultural-historical interplay of everyday legal experience, the collective imagination of law (often in the form of myths) as well as the musical processing of law, a particular structure of meaning emerged that can be visualized quite easily:

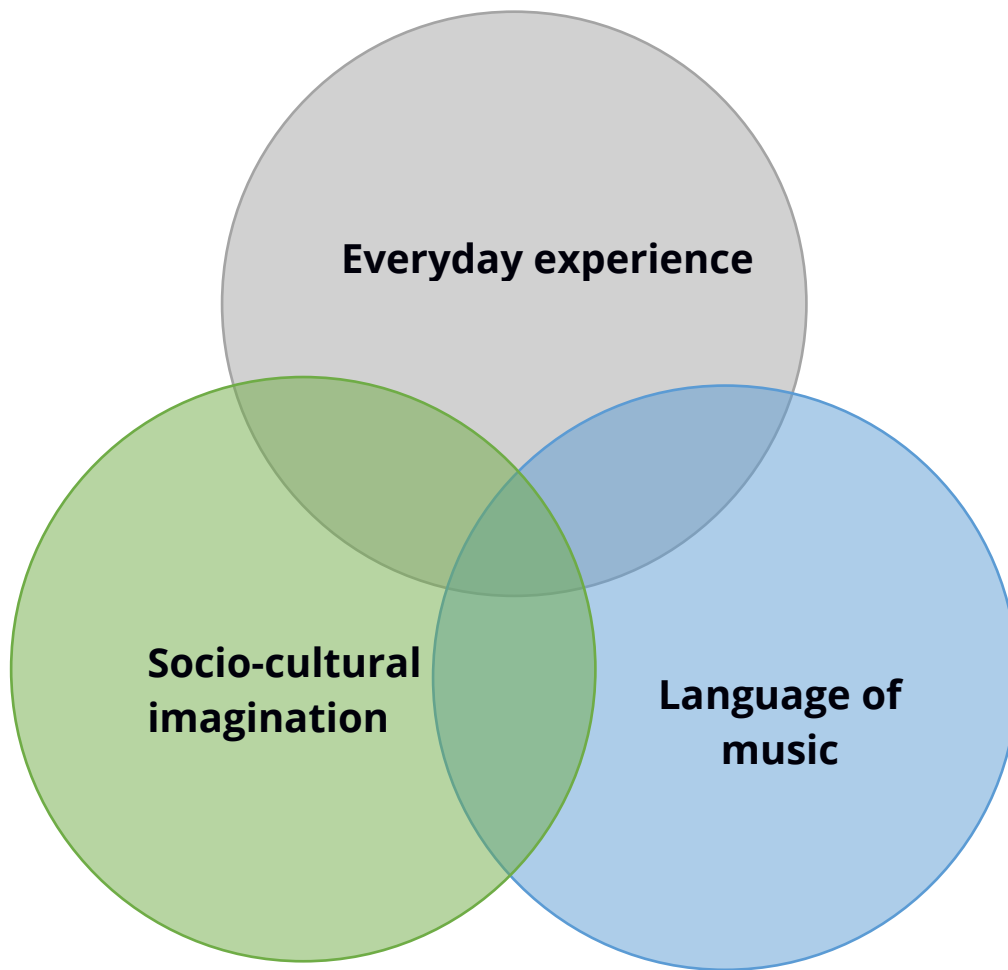


Figure 5: The structure of meaning of law and legal reference in the Styrian metal scene since 1980 (Graphic: author).

As a conclusion and starting point for further research, the current state of knowledge on the role of law and legal reference in the cultural history of the Styrian metal scene can be summarized in four hypotheses:

1. From the very beginning, the development of the Styrian metal scene took place in the closest interaction with the surrounding social structures and the law. *In this sense, heavy metal in Styria has always taken place within the legal sphere.*
2. Above all, the analysis of the area of law as an everyday experience makes it clear how much the scene's foundation in particular benefited from the existence of extensive legal security and legal safe spaces. *The liberal-democratic legal system contributed significantly to the specific form of development of the Styrian metal scene.*
3. The scene's internal critique of law in the sense of the "Breaking the Law" myth created a fertile ambivalence, the constant renegotiation of which (especially in the socio-cultural imagination and in the music itself) contributed to the consolidation of the scene's identity. *Ambivalence became a productive force in the Styrian metal scene.*
4. Thus, Styrian and Austrian history and legal history and the development of the scene ethos are closely related. Law, legal reference, justice, and morally right behavior were

topics of the social discourse in the Styrian metal scene that can be captured through the model of three overlapping circles. *In Styrian metal, law mattered in this way.*