This work is an attempt to understand the social world of improvised music using the example of the Tri-City, agglomeration of three towns in Poland: Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia. At its center are questions about what improvisation means to its participants, how they perceive it, what meanings they attribute to it, and what kinds of social relations emerge from it. The Tri-City improvised music scene, which is the subject of this study, is highly diverse. It includes academic environments, experimental spaces, and various grassroots initiatives. In each of these contexts, the life of the studied social world is organized differently.

The first chapter provides an in-depth description of the adopted theoretical framework, which constitutes the foundation of the entire research project (Clarke 1991; Kacperczyk 2016; Konecki 2015; Shibutani 1955; Strauss 1978, 1982, 1984, 1993; Unruh 1979, 1980). It introduces key definitions, analytical categories, and various research perspectives. Though introductory in nature, this chapter also serves an organizing function. Its goal is to explain what social worlds are and why this perspective proved to be the most adequate for studying the environment of improvising musicians. The first chapter thus outlines the theoretical context for the empirical section.

The following chapter introduces the specificity of the research subject – music as a social phenomenon. In the second chapter the emphasis shifts towards music itself and its place in sociological reflection (see Benson 2003; Hunt 2017; Jabłońska 2014, 2016; Mika 2019; Roy & Dowd 2010; Socha 2011, 2012, 2017; Supićić 1969). The aim here is to show how music can be analyzed as a social practice. This chapter discusses key research traditions within the sociology of music that have shaped this subdiscipline. In its later sections, two theoretical perspectives crucial for the study – phenomenological and interactionist – are presented. Phenomenology allows music to be grasped as part of the lived world, inseparably connected with the experience of the present moment and intersubjectivity (cf. Benson 2003; Husserl 2008; Jabłońska 2014; Schütz 1967, 2008; Venturini 2016). Symbolic interactionism, on the other hand, provides tools for analyzing music as a sphere of negotiated meanings, self-presentation, and the collective construction of reality based on symbolic layers (Blumer 1969; Goffman 1967, 1983, 2000; Mead 1975).

The final part of the second chapter is devoted to Howard S. Becker's concept (1976, 1982), which became a theoretical bridge between the sociology of music and the theory of social worlds. In analyzing art worlds, Becker points out that every artistic work emerges through the cooperation of many actors who create certain conventions, that is, modes of organizing these worlds. Moreover, Becker proposes a typology of artists, dividing them into naive artists, folk artists, integrated professionals, and mavericks. This typology makes it possible to view improvised music

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in a broader context, capturing the specific interactions occurring between different communities of improvising musicians. Thus, this chapter attempts to connect reflections on music with an analysis of its social dimension, preparing the ground for the empirical exploration of the Tri-City improvised music social world.

The third chapter takes the form of a confession, an account of the methodological process that accompanied the creation of the entire research project (cf. Konecki 2000). Its goal was both to describe the research procedure and to reveal the reflexive background from which the research emerged. In this sense, the chapter does not limit itself to presenting the technical aspects of the project but offers an attempt to understand and show the journey of the researcher-as-participant (and participant-as-researcher) navigating between two worlds: academic analysis and the practice of musical improvisation (cf. Anderson 2014; Hammersley & Atkinson 2001). It reveals the backstage of fieldwork as well as the tensions and dilemmas that arose at the intersection of the identities of researcher, sociologist, and improvising musician. This chapter also captures the emotional and ethical dimensions of qualitative research rooted in long-term presence in the field and co-participation in the studied practices.

Subsequent parts of the third chapter present the research tools used – participant observation, in-depth interviews, and elements of autoethnography – and the ways they were applied in relation to the study of the social world of improvised music. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the analytical process, which was conducted in the spirit of reflexive thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke 2024), combined with abductive reasoning (see Timmermans & Tavory 2012). It describes how analytical categories and themes were created step by step, how data related to theory, and how the experience of participation influenced the final interpretations.

The fourth chapter presents the interpretation of the collected empirical data, referring to the theoretical findings discussed in the first and second chapters. This chapter attempts a sociological grasp of the social world of improvised music in the Tri-City. It begins by defining the basic action: playing improvised music. It also analyzes how scholars interpret the concept of improvisation in music (Cobussen 2017; Ferand 1940; Monson 1996) and how the participants themselves understand improvisation, what meanings they assign to it, and how they describe the experience of creating sound together in real time. Attention is given to the phenomenological dimension of improvisation, how it happens "here and now" (cf. Husserl 2008). The chapter then describes the spaces in which improvised music takes place – jam sessions (cf. Berendt 1992; Berliner 1994; Cameron 1954; Cobussen 2017) – and how these spaces are perceived by the participants. The significance of jam sessions for the very existence of the social world is also considered.

The next section is devoted to analyzing various ways of playing improvised music which – drawing on social world theory – constitute technologies of primary action (Kacperczyk 2016; Konecki 2015; Strauss 1993). Seven key models of improvisation are distinguished: ethno, rock-popular, blues, be-bop, free jazz, electronic, and hip-hop. Each represents a different understanding of artistic freedom, determining distinct conventions and forms of interaction among participants of the social world (cf. Becker 1982). Analyzing and inductively distinguishing these technologies made it possible to observe how the diversity of musical practices translates into the segmentation of the social world and the formation of subworlds with differing rules of operation (cf. Kacperczyk 2016; Strauss 1982, 1984, 1993).

Building on the fourth chapter, the fifth chapter identifies selected subworlds of improvised music operating in the Tri-City scene. Its aim is to deepen the understanding of the diversity of practices, strategies, and organizational forms of musical life within the studied social world. Drawing on the assumptions of social world theory (Becker 1976, 1982; Clarke 1991; Kacperczyk 2016; Konecki 2005, 2015; Strauss 1978, 1982, 1984, 1993), the chapter analyzes how various musical communities – operating in different spatial and aesthetic contexts – construct their own forms of basic action, thereby creating subworlds with specific identities. Each subworld represents a unique configuration of meanings attributed to the practice of improvisation. Their analysis reveals how different modes of improvising realize a shared action paradigm. In this sense, musical improvisation emerges as a complex landscape of social practices in which different communicative strategies – or "languages of improvisation" (cf. Jabłońska 2014) – meet. These strategies shape the identities of individual subworlds, simultaneously professionalizing their primary action. It should be emphasized, however, that the subworlds identified in the fifth chapter represent only a fragment of the many subworlds active in the Tri-City area. Subworlds continually undergo processes characteristic of social worlds, as new communities emerge seeking to legitimize their activities (cf. Kacperczyk 2016; Strauss 1982).

The sixth chapter analyzes three selected case studies which represent key sites within the social world of improvised music in the Tri-City. All these sites fulfill similar theoretical functions: they are arenas – places of intersections and disputes; communication centers; and infrastructures enabling the performance of basic action (cf. Kacperczyk 2016; Zwarycz 2024). It is in these spaces that musical practice takes on concrete organizational forms, revealing tensions and boundaries of participation in the social world.

The chapter then discusses who the improvising musician is in the eyes of the participants, outlining the nature of this identity. It then offers a detailed analysis of each case study, presenting a picture of the many differences that shape the conventions regulating interactions among

participants, as well as the subworlds intersecting in these places, generating tensions and negotiations around the ways of performing primary action (cf. Becker 1982; Clarke 1991; Strauss 1978, 1993).

The final part of the chapter focuses on the communicative boundaries of participation in the studied world (cf. Shibutani 1955). The analysis includes situations in which musical conventions become barriers to participation and in which differing understandings of improvisation lead to inevitable conflicts between various groups. It also highlights how crucial attentiveness to co-participants is in the communication process and how focusing on oneself impedes successful interaction. The chapter also discusses attitudes toward substances and the ways different groups interpret their influence on the creative process.

Finally, the conclusion presents the most important findings of the study, summarizing both the empirical and theoretical parts. It revisits the research questions and reflects on the processes and phenomena observed throughout the research. It also outlines potential directions for future studies that could deepen the reflection on musical improvisation and on music *per se*. The author acknowledges the limitations of the project, which may have resulted in an incomplete picture of the studied world. The theoretical implications of applying social world theory are also emphasized, including analytical categories that may enrich future research on social worlds.