

## Chapter 7

### Negotiation I: Uncertain Connections

#### Introduction

In Chapter 1 of this thesis it was argued that the discursive complicity of descriptive, sponsorial, revisionist, sociohistorical, and analytic approaches to the study of 'music and copyright' do not equip us with the necessary theoretical tools with which to fully assess such relational implications of IMRO's expansion. Therefore, it was suggested, we require a sixth approach - retheorising.

This involves two steps. The first is counterinduction, or "the invention and elaboration of hypotheses inconsistent with a point of view that is highly confirmed and generally accepted" (Feyerabend 1978:47). In retrospect, there have been two major counterinductive moves in this thesis. One was the evasion of 'music' as a central focus in an ethnomusicological thesis, with the purpose of exploring wider social and political concerns, as discussed briefly in the introduction. Another was the break from the binary opposition of enclosure and the commons in order to come to an understanding of enclosure *without the commons*.

#### *The Emergence of Theory*

The second step of the retheorising approach is an openness to the emergence of theory as it arises from an examination of the expansion of the Irish Music Rights Organisation. Earlier, the complicities of standard approaches to 'music and copyright' were noted (see pp. 19-22). Furthermore, the basic assumptions of the Irish Music Rights Organisation were questioned, indeed, rejected (see pp. 23-24). It is necessary, then, to provide an alternative base of assumptions with which to undertake analysis of the relational implications of IMRO's expansion.

To this end, a theory of 'negotiation' is presented in Chapters 7 and 8. This theory provides a different set of working assumptions for our analysis. Through an understanding of negotiation we are drawn towards the recognition that IMRO's expansionary practices have *relational implications for our negotiations of meaning and power in social interaction*. The theory of negotiation, then, can be regarded as the first stage of emergent theory in this thesis, the second being the theory of enclosure, presented in Chapter 9.

*Rethorising: In Search of a Terrestrial Fulcrum.*

Following Myra Jehlen (1981), we might say that the task of retheorising is to find a "terrestrial fulcrum" (75) for a "radical comparativism" (83). Jehlen characterises feminist thinking as 'rethinking': "an examination of the way certain assumptions about women and the female character enter into the fundamental assumptions that organize all our thinking" (75). In claiming that such radical scepticism provides for new understandings, she also draws attention to the "unusual difficulties" that accompany such an approach by characterising it as a task of Archimedes. Were Archimedes to be able to lift the world with his lever, he would have required someplace else to stand and place his fulcrum. Jehlen likens this to the situation of feminists who question the presumptive order, thereby in many ways removing the ground from under their own feet. Thus, it would seem, they require an alternative base of assumptions, for "one has to assume something in order to reason at all" (ibid.). This is precisely the difficulty that must be confronted in our attempts to understand the relational implications of the expansion of the Irish Music Rights Organisation. In order to avoid discursive complicity it would seem that "like the Greek philosopher, we have to find a standpoint off this world altogether" (ibid.). The term 'Archimedean perspective' has thus come to refer to "one that is disinterested, impartial, value-free, or detached from the particular, historical social relations in which everyone participates" (Harding 1991:59). This is exactly the type of perspective that is claimed to inform the expansion of the Irish Music Rights Organisation.

But achieving an extraterrestrial standpoint was something, of course, which Archimedes, deprived of the benefits of space travel, was not able to do. He remained earthbound and the earth stayed where it was. But, in acknowledging this, Jehlen reclaims an insight which proves most useful for our purposes. What Archimedes really needed, she argues, was a “terrestrial fulcrum”, and, likewise, she argues that this is the requirement of a feminist project of *rethinking*: “a standpoint from which we can see our conceptual universe whole but which nonetheless rests firmly on male ground” (1981:75). To reconfigure this in the current context, what is required to escape a damaging discursive complicity in our analysis of the expansion of IMRO is a terrestrial fulcrum that allows us to ground a “radical comparativism”, that is, a theoretical perspective that can come to terms with the complexities of this expansion as an example of a particular character of social and political relations, viewed from the mundane perspective of humans-among-humans. Thus we might work towards meshing an analysis of the expansion of the Irish Music Rights Organisation and an analysis of interpretive practices - the world of meaning and power relations. In other words, we might respond to Halbert’s (1999) call, moving outside the law, and into other modes of speaking.

### *Negotiation: The Terrestrial Fulcrum*

The terrestrial fulcrum chosen to understand the production and generation of meaning, power, and expectation is “negotiation”. The term “negotiation” most generally refers to a wide range of social contexts and processes in which the people involved experience an adjustive and adaptive experience. The situations and processes covered by general usage of the term include bargaining, arbitration, discussion, compromise, brokering, exchange, and conflict mediation. In academic research, however, the term “negotiation” has come to be associated with an expanding body of literature dealing largely with social interaction and the social construction of organisational processes,

and is particularly associated with the research of Anselm Strauss (e.g., 1978).<sup>1</sup> The concept of negotiation as understood by Strauss is broad and inclusive. It is constituted by three elements: first, interaction or communication; second, agreement; and, third, change and adjustment on the part of the agents involved. This would seem to be consistent with the usage offered by Erving Goffman: “we personally negotiate aspects of all the arrangements under which we live, but often once these are negotiated, we continue on mechanically as though the matter had always been settled”(Goffman 1974:2). For Strauss and Goffman, then, there are times when negotiation does not occur. As David Maines notes, however, the term “negotiation” has been criticised as “a quite imprecise term if one wishes to think of it as a sociological concept”(1977:243). It has even been suggested that as the term “negotiation” is used in sociological literature it often refers not just to an aspect of the social order, but to the social process itself.<sup>2</sup>

In this thesis, the term “negotiation” does indeed refer generally to “the social process”, and, as such, there are never times when negotiation does not occur. The manner in which the term is used here is, however, very specific. Although in sympathy with the broader literature, my understanding of “negotiation” has developed independently of it. For our purposes, “negotiation” is constituted by four elements:

- The ever-presence of uncertainty
- The emergence of certainty
- Social Interaction
- Expectation

The presentation of the theory of negotiation is divided in two parts.

The first part, “Uncertain Connections”, provides a discussion of the first two elements of negotiation. The first element of negotiation is the ever-presence of uncertainty. A new approach to uncertainty is proposed, in which a physiological grounding for our experience of uncertainty is suggested. Uncertainty is here understood as a constant and dynamic element of consciousness. The second element in our understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars advocating what might be called the “negotiation perspective” include Strauss et. al. (1963), Glaser and Strauss (1964), Scheff (1968), Hall and Spencer-Hall (1982), Maines (1977, 1982), Levy (1982), and Fine (1984).

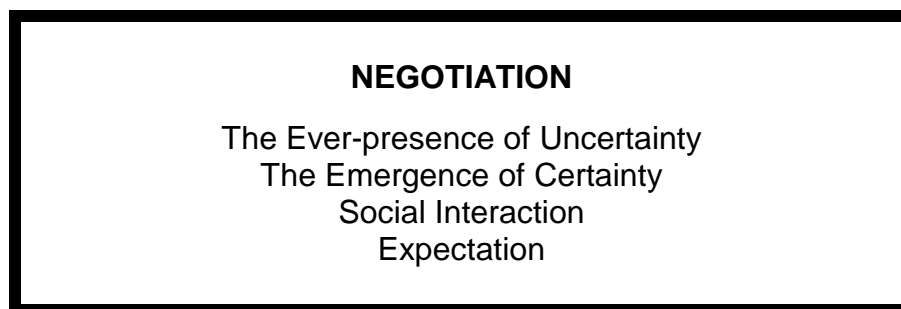
<sup>2</sup> See Alan Bond’s website at <http://www.cs.caltech.edu/~bond/cs101c/commit/node3.html>.

negotiation is the emergence of certainty. An alternative approach to certainty is proposed, in which a physiological grounding for our experience of certainty is suggested. Certainty, like uncertainty, is taken to refer to a constant and dynamic element of consciousness.

Chapter 8, “The Power of Expectation”, presents the last two elements of negotiation. In this part we extend the physiologically-grounded insights about uncertainty and certainty to encompass discussion of social and political dynamics.

The third element of negotiation is social interaction. Social interaction is here understood as the constant and dynamic relational environment of negotiation. An understanding of social interaction can lead us to an understanding of the role of power in negotiation.

The fourth element of negotiation is expectation. Expectation is here understood as the basic condition of consciousness, the nexus of our isomorphic experience of uncertainty and certainty. Our experience of expectation, it is argued, is associative, cumulative, adaptive, individually-negotiated, structured, directive, and composite. An understanding of all four of these elements of negotiation, as they are presented here, provides an alternative base of assumptions with which to proceed in our examination of the relational implications of the expansion of the Irish Music Rights Organisation.



**Figure 3. The Elements of Negotiation**

## **The Ever-presence of Uncertainty**

Uncertainty is ever-present. This is a basic premise in our understanding of 'negotiation', and one which directly challenges the expectation of uncertainty elimination. In this section we explore the term 'uncertainty'. Two contrasting uses of the term will be briefly examined. They can be broadly distinguished as 'behavioural uncertainty' and 'fundamental uncertainty'. Stemming from the use of the concept of 'uncertainty' within information theory, behavioural uncertainty is gauged by the number of alternatives available in a given situation of decision-making and the relative likelihood of their occurrence. Uncertainty, then, increases as the alternatives increase. In contrast, it will be shown, the concept of 'fundamental uncertainty', championed by certain post-Keynesian economists, has a temporal rather than a behavioural focus, emphasising the absence of deterministic laws and social processes. This position holds that the past cannot at all be relied upon as a guide to the course of future events, and thus 'fundamental uncertainty' might also be understood to refer to what has been termed 'perfect uncertainty'. Both behavioural uncertainty and fundamental uncertainty are, then, constructed in relation to the concept of absolute predictability; the first on the basis of it, the second in direct opposition to it. A different understanding of uncertainty will be suggested here, however. Arguing that uncertainty is a fundamental condition of human life, recourse is taken to the work of neuroscientist Susan Greenfield. By taking Greenfield's analysis of emotions to refer to the experience of uncertainty, we can come to a more comprehensive understanding of uncertainty and its relation to consciousness. It is proposed that the experience of uncertainty is a basic form of consciousness.

### *Behavioural Uncertainty and Fundamental Uncertainty*

Having identified a pervasive general tendency towards the elimination of uncertainty as the foundation for the expansion of the Irish Music Rights Organisation, it is perhaps instructive to follow Stephen P. Dunn (2001a) in acknowledging the need to distinguish

at least two broad schools of thought in relation to uncertainty within discourses of economics:

- Orthodox behavioural theories that focus on outcomes, probability, and predictability; and
- Post-Keynesian analysis, particularly the work of Paul Davidson (1988, 1991) and Dunn himself (2001a), that draws a conceptual distinction between behavioural uncertainty and “fundamental” uncertainty, otherwise understood as the impossibility of foreseeing future knowledge.

The first of these, behavioural uncertainty, is about outcomes, probability, and predictability. In this scheme, uncertainty concerns what course of action to take in a particular situation. Uncertainty therefore implies the issue of choice and decision-making. Garner (1975), drawing upon information theory to present a psychological analysis of uncertainty, remarks: “The uncertainty associated with any particular outcome of an event is inversely related to the probability of that particular outcome; and thus the information obtained when the particular outcome occurs can be directly interpreted in terms of the probability of occurrence” (24). A relationship is established, then, between uncertainty and information, information being that which is obtained by a reduction in uncertainty, information being regarded as the opposite of uncertainty. Following the logic of this position, as Garner points out, uncertainty can be understood as potential information: “What now constitutes uncertainty is always potential information, and, in a moment, may be information; and what is information for you may be uncertainty for me” (7). It is interesting that Berger and Bradac (1982) juxtapose uncertainty and knowledge, calling knowledge “the reverse side of the uncertainty coin” (8). Berger and Bradac’s particular concern is the role of uncertainty and uncertainty reduction in interpersonal relationships, defining behavioural uncertainty as “the extent to which behaviour is predictable in a given situation” (7). This takes us away from choice and decision-making. Nevertheless, this understanding is still consistent with our characterisation of behavioural uncertainty as concerning outcomes, probability, and predictability.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In Chapter 5 (see p. 122) we saw that Marris, too, understands uncertainty in direct relation to predictability: “What constitutes as uncertainty depends on what we want to be able to predict, what we can predict, and what we might be able to do about it” (1996:16). This, we noted, is particularly relevant in the context of the expectation of the elimination of uncertainty, whereupon anything that does not conform to absolute predictability is understood as an uncertainty that must be eradicated.

Understandings within post-Keynesian analysis provide an alternative perspective on uncertainty in economics, however. Dunn (2001a) draws attention to the prevalence of behavioural understandings of uncertainty within bounded rationality approaches<sup>4</sup>, developed from the work of Herbert Simon (1959, 1961). In contradistinction to the probabilistic understandings of behavioural uncertainty within bounded rationality, however, Dunn highlights the work of Paul Davidson (1988, 1991) whose concept of “fundamental uncertainty” draws attention to the distinction between “ergodic” and “nonergodic” processes, statistical concepts that are grounded respectively in the stasis of immutable determinism and the chaos of transmutable indeterminism. To put this more simply, this is a distinction between an emphasis on predictability in behavioural uncertainty and an emphasis on unpredictability in fundamental uncertainty. Behavioural uncertainty, says Dunn, relates to the behavioural characteristics of agents. Fundamental uncertainty, on the other hand, “relates to the essential unknowability of the future, to creative human agency and the unique nature of unfolding time” (2001a:568). Davidson’s understanding of fundamental, or what he has called elsewhere “true” uncertainty (1991), stems from Keynes’ analyses of uncertainty. By “uncertainty”, Keynes did “not mean merely to distinguish what is known for certain from what is only probable. ... The sense in which I am using the term is that ... there is no scientific basis on which to form any calculable probability whatever. We simply do not know” (cited in Davidson 1991:131). Within the frameworks offered by theories of fundamental uncertainty, then, “agents are truly uncertain in that there are no deterministic laws or equations to discover” (Dunn 2001a:572).<sup>5</sup>

Understandings of uncertainty in both ‘behavioural’ and ‘fundamental’ paradigms fit not so much within theories of action or activity so much as into theories of decision-

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<sup>4</sup> The term “bounded rationality” refers to economic decision-making that is “*intendedly* rational but only *limitedly* so” (Simon 1961:xxiv). The framework of rational choice (see Zey 1998) arguably remains, then, the central referent of bounded rationality approaches. The limits come from the presumed ‘cognitive limitations’ of the decision-maker with regard to the informational processing abilities of knowledge acquisition and computational capacity. This range of limitations presumably prevents economic actors from behaving in ways that approximate the predictions of classical or neo-classical economic theory (see Dunn 2001a).

<sup>5</sup> Fundamental uncertainty, then, approximates to what Galtung (1979:185) refers to as ‘perfect uncertainty’.

making. On the one hand, there is the question of probabilistic decision-making in the face of uncertainty arising from the range of information available. On the other hand, we have decision-making made in the face of ignorance of an open, transmutable future. Both approaches offer widely-varying and oft-times mutually-exclusive understandings of time, choice, and agency (Dunn 2001a). The terms ‘behavioural uncertainty’ and ‘fundamental uncertainty’ can still be characterised, though, without too much violence to the complexity of these positions, to the configuration ‘uncertainty *about*’. This still brings us no closer to an understanding of the character of uncertainty, or to the relational implications of a tendency towards the elimination of uncertainty. What we need is a theory that concerns itself not with ‘uncertainty about’ but ‘about uncertainty’. It is to this task that we now turn.

### *Towards a New Understanding of Uncertainty*

We are moving then towards an understanding of the meaning and role of uncertainty in what we term ‘negotiation’. We have drawn attention to the need to characterise our experience of uncertainty itself, as opposed to characterising the role of uncertainty in decision-making processes. It will be important first to establish that uncertainty here refers to a condition of human life and existence. Indeed, following Foucault, we now state that what we are looking for is a principle of uncertainty-as-law. The work of neuroscientist Susan Greenfield suggests that emotion is the most basic form of consciousness. We will now usefully transpose Greenfield’s argument and restate it as saying that the experience of uncertainty is the basic form of consciousness.

Johan Galtung remarks that “not only is uncertainty a necessary condition for what one might refer to as the historicity of human beings, it may also be said to be a necessary condition for human life itself” (1979:189). Peter Marris’ approach is a little more nuanced. For Marris, uncertainty is not so much a condition *for* human life, as it is a condition *of* human life (1996:1).<sup>6</sup> For Erving Goffman uncertainty is an integral part of

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<sup>6</sup> Uncertainty for Marris, too, is generally concerned with outcomes, predictability, and decision-making. He writes: “Uncertainty is a fundamental condition of human life. We try to master it by discovering the

social interaction, which is undertaken in a condition of “special doubt” or “puzzlement” (1974:302). It would seem to be inferred by each of these perspectives that uncertainty, then, is not only an element of human life, but a *constant* element of human existence. To appropriate Foucault’s insights on power for our own purposes, we might even say that we are looking to elaborate a principle of uncertainty-as-law, namely the fact that there is no escaping from uncertainty, that it is always-present, constituting the very thing which one attempts to counter it with (Foucault 1990:82).

It might be useful here to turn to the work of neuroscientist Susan Greenfield. In her book, The Private Life of the Brain (2000), Greenfield explores possible correlations between theories of mind, theories of consciousness, and the physiology of the brain. She does this in response to a dominant objectivism in her field which ignores “the obvious yet frustrating fact that consciousness is a highly private event” (2).<sup>7</sup> This objectivism has led to a radical separation of the presumed mutually-exclusive phenomena of emotion and logical thinking. A common factor in this recurrent paradigm is “the basic assumption that when you are thinking, being reasonable, and indulging your individual memories, there is no emotion present at all” (2000:15). Greenfield, in reply, comments: “But surely the idea of no emotion at all is alien to our ideas of being human” (ibid.). Simplifying in the extreme, Greenfield’s exploration is supported by a key hypothesis, that emotion is the most basic form of consciousness. Indeed, she goes as far as to state in an interview for the journal Worldlink that:

For me, consciousness and emotion are one and the same thing. The concept of having an emotion without being conscious is almost a paradox in terms. Similarly, the idea of having consciousness without some kind of residual feeling is hard. Most of the time we’re not having road rage and we’re not in great ecstasy. But one has some residual mood and residual feeling. It’s always there every moment you are awake (Cohen 2001).

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regularities in events which enable us to predict and control them. When they do not turn out as we expected, we look for ways to revise our understanding, our purposes and means of control. When we cannot foretell what will happen, we try to keep our choices of action open; and when none of these choices seems hopeful, we try to withdraw into familiar certainties or fall into despair. The management of uncertainty is therefore a very individual endeavour, because each of us learns in our own way, through our unique experience, to find patterns of events, and develops our own strategies of control and avoidance” (1996:1).

<sup>7</sup> In making her point, Greenfield refers to philosopher John Searle’s remark that studying the brain without an interest in consciousness is like studying the stomach without an interest in digestion (2000:2).

For Greenfield, then, some kind of emotional state is present whenever you are conscious (2000:16). Emotions are with us all the time, albeit at a spectrum of intensity. They just are (20). Far from being radically separate from thinking, “Emotions are the building blocks of human mentality. Even when you think you’re just thinking, it’s shot through with some kind of emotional tone” (Sunday Times 1998)<sup>8</sup>.

At first glance, Greenfield’s work may not seem to be particularly helpful. One weakness which might be noted in Greenfield’s argument is an uncritical use of the terms ‘emotion’, ‘feelings’, ‘subjectivity’, ‘individuality’, and ‘self’, possibly leaving any use of her work in this thesis open to discursive complicity with romantic discourses of genius, originality, and authorship, discourses which play a crucial role in the perpetuation of copyright. There are very suggestive echoes, however, between Goffman’s ‘special doubt’ and Greenfield’s ‘residual feeling’, and Greenfield’s search for the principles of emotion-as-law clearly parallel our search here for the principles of uncertainty-as-law. If we substitute the term ‘uncertainty’ for each use of the term ‘emotion’ in Greenfield’s work, we can usefully re-address Greenfield’s work in light of the particular concerns of this thesis. We can thereby understand ‘emotion’ as a subcategory of ‘uncertainty’. By using Greenfield’s work in this way, while also eschewing the terms ‘self’ and ‘subjectivity’, we may open doors to some very fruitful inquiry as we move towards an understanding of ‘negotiation’.

Our understanding of uncertainty as an element of ‘negotiation’ is distinct from theories of behavioural uncertainty and fundamental uncertainty. Where these understandings of uncertainty retain decision-making as a central definitional referent, here the experience of uncertainty refers more to a dynamic and ever-present condition of consciousness. Uncertainty is with us all the time, albeit experienced in degrees of intensity. It is suggested that our physiological response to uncertainty, our awareness of uncertainty, is distributed or channelled across the neural networks of the brain. So it is that we experience uncertainty both as ever-present and at varying degrees of intensity.

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<sup>8</sup> This article may be found at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,474-63015,00.html>.

## *Awareness of Uncertainty*

Our awareness of uncertainty varies. This, despite the fact that, at least while we are alive, stimulation of the nervous system and the brain is constant. That is to say, our physiological response to uncertainty is both at a constant level of stimulation, but also differentially distributed in various parts of the brain at various times. As a result, the constancy of uncertainty is paradoxically experienced as a variable. We can get a clearer picture of our awareness of uncertainty by aligning our understanding of it with the physiological indicator of 'arousal'. As Susan Greenfield explains:

Arousal is not only a useful everyday term for describing how excited or sleepy we are but a physiological reality. Deep in the most primitive region of the brain, the brain stem, are diffuse groups of neurons that send their connections throughout the rest of the brain to release their transmitters. They act not so much as local specific messengers but more like fountains. These diverse chemicals (dopamine, serotonin, noradrenaline, and acetylcholine) are differentially active at different times of the day and night. But they are always at work, energizing the rest of the brain to different degrees and in different ways (2000:41).

Arousal, it is argued, is a physiological indicator of our awareness of uncertainty. It is interesting to note here that R. G. Collingwood (1938) observed that 'feeling as *sensation*' and 'feeling as *emotion*' are a unified experience: "Referring to the evidence of colour symbolism of the Middle Ages ..., Collingwood argued that, at that period in history, people would not have been conscious of seeing a colour (sensation) and feeling a certain emotion as being separate" (Cherry 1979:79). Sensation and emotion are conflated here, then, as aspects of our experience of uncertainty united by the 'physiological reality' of arousal.

In this section we have moved towards a preliminary understanding of the principle of uncertainty-as-law, that is, that uncertainty is inevitable. We have established that the usage of the term 'uncertainty' in the theoretical framework of this thesis is very different from the usage of the term in the concepts of 'behavioural uncertainty' and 'fundamental uncertainty'. Uncertainty here refers not to processes of decision-making but to a condition of human existence. By appropriating and adapting the work of neuroscientist Susan Greenfield, it was suggested that our constant and dynamic experience of uncertainty is the most basic form of consciousness, indeed, that consciousness and

the experience of uncertainty are synonymous. Uncertainty, then, is inevitable. By adopting the physiological phenomenon of arousal as synonymous with our awareness of uncertainty it was suggested that 'sensation' and 'emotion' can feasibly be included as aspects of our experience of the 'physiological reality' of uncertainty awareness.

## The Emergence of Certainty

Uncertainty is ever-present, and a significant element of negotiation. The second element in this presentation of negotiation is the "emergence of certainty" in our engagement with the experience of uncertainty. The term 'certainty' must, then, be discussed. Our experience of certainty in negotiation is, like our experience of uncertainty, somewhat paradoxical, being both constant and dynamic, experienced as ever-present and at varying degrees of intensity. We can speak, then, of our experience of emergent certainty. Five points are salient in this regard:

- *Certitude*. The understanding of the experience of certainty in negotiation is to be distinguished from what we might term "foundationalist" perspectives that take 'certainty' to be synonymous with eliminated uncertainty. We might more usefully understand foundationalist usage of the term as 'certitude'.
- *Certainty in and through Uncertainty*. In contrast to foundationalist assumptions, it is posited that our experience of certainty cannot be separated in experience from our awareness of uncertainty. Our experience of certainty, like our experience of uncertainty, is constant.
- *Certainty and Synaptic Transmission*. It is argued that our experience of certainty has physiological correlates. By acknowledging that the physiological dynamics of brain activity have as their foundation the process of synaptic transmission, simplistically understood as the process of associative thinking, we can draw a correlation between our experience of certainty and what is known as 'brain plasticity'. This refers in particular to the use-it-or-lose-it dynamics of Hebbian Learning.
- *Making Sense of Our World*. Our experience of certainty, then, *can never be fixed*. Furthermore, certainty is taken to be broadly synonymous with meaning. Certainty emerges in relation to our awareness of uncertainty, structuring our engagement with the world. By understanding the emergence of certainty we can begin to appreciate the capacity we exhibit to perceive, organise, and understand relationships. In particular we focus on the emergence of associative, cumulative, adaptive, and individually-negotiated "structures of meaning".
- *The Isomorphism of Uncertainty and Certainty*. It is suggested that there is a direct correlation between our experience of emergent certainty and our awareness of uncertainty. The term "isomorphism" is used to refer to this correlation, whereby our experience of uncertainty at any time is inversely proportional to our emergent and structured experience of certainty. This isomorphism is established as a key aspect of consciousness in negotiation.

## *Certitude*

It is important in our discussion of the emergence of meaning in negotiation to distinguish what is understood here as the experience of ‘certainty’ from positions that understand ‘certainty’ as an absence of doubt, a condition synonymous with the elimination of uncertainty<sup>9</sup>. Fueled by “the Cartesian dogma that only the indubitable is true” (McCloskey 1994a:398), certainty in this formulation is the assumed achievement of a one-to-one equivalence between the thinking mind and the natural order of an objective, fixed, stable, immutable reality. This presumed objective reality is deemed accessible for the most part through the rational, logical methods of scientific inquiry. Scholars such as John Dewey (1929), Richard Rorty (1979), Donald N. McCloskey (1994), and Edward S. Reed (1996), have drawn attention to this “quest for certainty” insofar as it underpins the dominant trends of European and American philosophical thought. For example, Rorty characterises the search by Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Russell, and Carnap for the foundations of knowledge as “the triumph of the quest for certainty over the quest for wisdom” (1979:61). Todd May characterises this quest as “foundationalism”. Foundationalism, May summarises, presumes “that the world and our experience of it can be brought under absolute or indubitable conceptual categories, categories that do not allow for conceptual slippage” (1997:3). In words highly redolent of our earlier discussion of monologic utterance and authoritative discourse (see pp. 140-144), May further explains foundationalism as:

The project of giving an account (of some object of study) that is exhaustive and indubitable. An exhaustive account is one that says all that needs to be said on the issue. There may be more details to add, but the essence of the matter is captured. An indubitable account is one that cannot be surpassed; it is the final say on the matter (*ibid.*).

We might more usefully understand foundationalist usages of the term ‘certainty’, then, referring to that which is indubitable, as ‘certitude’: “a kind of assent from which doubt is not only in fact absent but absent of necessity, because such assent and doubt are incompatible” (M. J. Ryan 1908:539). As discussed in Chapter 6 (see pp. 140-144), this

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<sup>9</sup> Uncertainty, as we saw earlier (Berger and Bradac 1982; Garner 1975) can be posited in this formulation as the opposite of knowledge or information. Uncertainty is synonymous, then, with error. For a discussion of the range of meanings associated with the term “error” see Sosnoski (1989).

is the assent required in the face of the “necessary” authority of the Irish Music Rights Organisation. Certitude is, indeed, what the authority of IMRO relies upon.

### *Certainty in and through Uncertainty*

Our understanding of certainty as an element of ‘negotiation’ is distinct from foundationalist understandings of certainty or certitude. Where these understandings of certainty retain the elimination of uncertainty as a central definitional referent, here our experience of certainty refers to a paradoxically dynamic and ever-present condition of consciousness. In negotiation, the experience of certainty cannot, then, be separated from the experience of uncertainty, also a dynamic and ever-present condition of consciousness. Certainty is with us all the time, albeit experienced in degrees of intensity.

### *Certainty and Synaptic Transmission*

We can gauge the *ever-present* character of our experience of certainty, or our experience of uncertainty, for that matter, in and through the physiological process of synaptic transmission. It is suggested that our *variable* experience of certainty is manifested physiologically in the degree to which synaptic patterns are strengthened within the neural networks of the brain. Two terms which we might use interchangeably to refer to this process of synaptic strengthening are ‘reinforcement’ and ‘sedimentation’. So it is that we experience certainty both as ever-present and at varying degrees of intensity.

E. M. Forster writes “only connect” in Howard’s End<sup>10</sup> as an advisory. “Connecting”, however, is simply what happens as we negotiate experience. As Susan Greenfield notes, this “connecting”, the process known as synaptic transmission, “is regarded as the basic building block of virtually all brain operations” (2000:7). As neuropsychologist Ian Robertson states in Mind Sculpture: “Everything which makes up ‘you’ ... is

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<sup>10</sup> See the ‘Only Connect’ website at <http://www.musicandmeaning.com/forster>.

embroidered in a trembling web of 100 billion brain cells.<sup>11</sup> On average, each cell is connected 1,000 times with other neurons, making a total of 100,000 billion connections” (1999:8). What accompanies our experience, then, is incessant brain activity. This is known as synaptic transmission because the gaps between brain cells (called “neurons” or “neurones”), across which these connections are made, are called synapses.<sup>12</sup> We might, then, usefully consider our experience of reality to be, at base, a constant process of associative thinking. In the words of Robertson: “At this very moment, as you read this sentence, exactly this cascade of brain-cell firings is happening in your brain” (1999:9). Our constant experience of both uncertainty and certainty can be disclosed, then, by an acknowledgement of the constant process of synaptic transmission.

It is further suggested that the variability, the degrees of intensity of our experience of certainty can be gauged by an examination of what is known as “brain plasticity”: “where physical changes can be seen in the degree and extent of connections between neurons in certain brain regions, as a result of injury, or more commonly, simple everyday experience” (Greenfield 2000:12). Greenfield notes that it is only in recent years, perhaps even the last decade, that the details of what is often referred to as Hebbian Learning have come to light (66). In the 1940s, psychologist Donald Hebb identified what he termed ‘synaptic strengthening’ as the basis for learning and memory processes. A key element in synaptic strengthening is the process of ‘long term potentiation’, “whereby a priming stimulation of a neuronal connection makes that connection more sensitive to subsequent, incoming signals” (208). Robertson explains:

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<sup>11</sup> We are reminded of the words of Clifford Geertz, that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (Geertz 1973:4).

<sup>12</sup> As Greenfield describes this process: “First, one neuron generates an electrical signal lasting a thousandth of a second, and of an amplitude ranging anywhere from some sixty thousandths to ninety thousandths of a volt: this is the *action potential*, an electric blip that hurtles down to the end of the neuron at speeds of up to 250 miles per hour. Once it reaches the end of the neuron, the electrical impulse acts as a trigger for the [chemical] transmitter to be released. The transmitter then diffuses rapidly across the narrow synapse between the two cells, and joins in a molecular handshake with an appropriate custom-made chemical (*receptor*) embedded on the outside of the target neuron. This molecular handshake, perhaps more akin to a hand fitting in a glove, initiates the final step, the generation of a new action potential in the target cell” (2000:7). A popular introduction to this process can also be found in Robertson’s *Mind Sculpture* (1999:5-9).

After a few repetitions of firing together, [neuron(e)s] tend to team up. When two connected neurones have been triggered at the same time on several occasions, the cells and synapses between them change chemically so that when one now fires, it will be a stronger trigger to the other. In other words, they become partners and in future will fire off in tandem much more readily than before (1999:10).

What is particularly interesting is that as synaptic strengthening continues it is possible that changes within the neuronal cells themselves may occur, in which “the density of connections, or at least the manufacture of further molecular machinery for more effective communication” is altered indefinitely (Greenfield 2000:66). Another key term is ‘long term depression’ (LTD), which is in some ways the inverse of LTP, in which an absence of stimulation of neuronal connections makes the connection less sensitive to subsequent signals. As Greenfield phrases it: “our brains are working incessantly on the use-it-or-lose-it principle. Just like the muscles of your body, connections in the brain will strengthen and grow as they are exercised” (2000:62). Robertson (1999) likewise simplifies the processes in two principles: ‘Cells that fire together wire together’ and ‘When cells fire apart, wires depart’. It is suggested that our experience of certainty correlates directly to the degree to which synaptic strengthening occurs in the neural networks of the brain.

Two terms which will be used almost interchangeably to refer to the process of synaptic strengthening are “reinforcement” and “sedimentation”. Although the subject of much theoretical debate, which has largely questioned the nature of the processes involved, reinforcement is accepted as something that actually occurs (Hargie et al 1981). Theoretical stances dealing with reinforcement have developed mainly within the stimulus-response school of behaviourism, particularly in the work of B. F. Skinner (1953, 1969), who conceived of reinforcement as a social skill. Within the range of reinforcement as a social skill we find verbal reinforcers such as acknowledgement or praise, and non-verbal reinforcers such as smiling, looking, touch, gestures, posture, body proximity, and the realm of paralanguage - how something is said as opposed to what is said (Hargie et al. 1981). Within Skinner’s behaviourist model, reinforcement is seen as the “the process whereby an event, when made contingent upon the emergence of a particular piece of behaviour, increases the probability of that piece of behaviour recurring under similar circumstances” (44). The term “reinforcement” is here

used as another way to refer to the process of synaptic strengthening. The term “sedimentation” is taken from the work of Berger and Luckmann, where it refers to the way things “congeal in recollection as recognisable and memorable entities” (1966:85). Both reinforcement and sedimentation here refer, then, to a central process in our emergent experience of certainty.

### *Making Sense of Our World*

We now suggest that the term “certainty” is broadly synonymous with the term “meaning”. Meaning, then, resides in connectivity and association. If connections are the basis for meaning, then as connections increase, so, too, does our experience of meaning:

“This rapidly expanding inner world of personal associations offers an ever-growing framework of reference, an increasing degree of meaning to ongoing experience. The most obvious type of meaning is the culturally and socially accepted identity of objects and people around us. But gradually these objects and people acquire ever more eccentric and intense degrees of significance. The more ramifying and multiple the associations, the more “meaning,” or “relevance,” an object will have” (Greenfield 2000:52).

Our experience of certainty is, then, equated with our experience of meaning. To say that our experience of certainty is emergent and cumulative is not to say, however, that meaning is ever fixed, or that the emergence of meaning is teleological. Again, this would be to equate certainty with certitude, to equate meaning with the elimination of uncertainty. Meaning can never be fixed. Although constant, our experience of both certainty and uncertainty is never static, always variable. As noted before, the stimulation of physiological arousal is constant, and the associative endeavours of synaptic transmission are always at work: “Each time you hear a noise, blink at the light, have a conversation, or cut another piece of cake, some small, imperceptible, and unspectacular modification to the configuration of the brain occurs, and we interpret the world in a slightly different way” (Greenfield 2000:54). As psychotherapist David Smail writes: “Human beings exist in a delicate and sensitive relationship of mutual transaction with their surrounding world” (1997:86). Just as awareness of uncertainty is inevitable, and experience of certainty is inevitable, so too, and relatedly, is change inevitable. It is important to note, however, that “It is not the brain cells themselves that change and

continue to change, so much as the *connections* between them” (Greenfield 2000:61). In Mind Sculpture, Ian Robertson conveys this very forcefully by informing the unsuspecting reader on the very first page that: “By the time you have read this far you will have changed your brain permanently” (1999:1). Our experience of meaning is constantly adaptive.

It is perhaps clear at this stage that the understanding of negotiation thus far outlined is broadly sympathetic with certain aspects of constructivist positions. Constructivism refers to a family of interrelated theories that challenge realist and objectivist positions, placing emphasis instead on the active, participative role that humans have in the interpretive construal of their personal realities. Common to all constructivist positions is “the assumptive framework that emphasizes the necessarily limited and fallible nature of all our quests to know” (Neimeyer and Neimeyer 1993:1). In particular, the understanding of negotiation presented here shares the following assumptions: that human beings are oriented actively towards a meaningful understanding of the world in which they live; that the meanings that emerge in and through our experience are local, partial, and situated; and, that these meanings are continuously in a process of change. ‘Negotiation’ is to be distinguished from ‘construction’, however. The ‘negotiation’ position differs from constructivist positions in one important respect, rejecting the assumption that meaning is *subjectively* constructed (e.g., Kelly 1955; Berger and Luckman 1966). This assumption leads to the belief that we are denied direct access to any ‘external’ reality, that: “we can have little more than indirect, mediated, and partial access to a series of transformed and forever shifting “realities,” flickering images given shape and substance by the very processes that yield them” (Neimeyer and Neimeyer 1993:2). Although designed in contradistinction to objectivism, constructivist approaches continue to rely heavily on the subject-object opposition. By focusing instead on the constant and dynamic condition of our experience of uncertainty and certainty, and by understanding this experience as the most basic form of consciousness, it is hoped that the subject-object dichotomy is evaded. At the very least, the dichotomy does not provide for a fundamental premise of this negotiational approach. As Lakoff and

Johnson have remarked: “What the myths of objectivism and subjectivism both miss is the way we *understand* the world through our *interactions* with it” (1980:194).

Our awareness of uncertainty and the emergence of certainty is physiologically rooted in processes of associative thinking. The physiological dynamics of neurological activity have as their foundation the process of synaptic transmission. We can draw a correlation between our emergent experience of certainty and processes of synaptic strengthening and weakening, processes encapsulated by the term ‘brain plasticity’. We have established, then, that certainty here refers not to certitude but to a dynamic and ever-present condition of consciousness. We have also established that uncertainty, too, refers not to behavioural or fundamental uncertainty but to a dynamic and ever-present condition of consciousness. We will now link these last two propositions by suggesting that certainty, that is, meaning, emerges in and through our experience of uncertainty. Together, uncertainty and certainty constitute our constant and dynamic experience of consciousness<sup>13</sup>. Our experience of consciousness, however, is also an experience of emergent structure and structuring processes. We now turn our attention to what we understand as “structures of meaning”, structures that arise in and through negotiation. Our understanding of “structure” here is contrasted with the use of the term in Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism. Rather than referring to invariant and immanent cohesiveness, the term “structures of meaning” here refers to *the emergent, cumulative, associative, adaptive, and uniquely-experienced relations constituted in and through our awareness of uncertainty and our experience of emergent certainty*.

Central to human experience is the capacity to perceive, organise, and understand relationships (Marris 1996:39). Psychotherapist M. J. Mahoney writes that: “We are neurologically wired to classify our experiences and to transform the buzzing, booming confusion<sup>14</sup> of sensation into some codified and dynamic representation of the world” (1982:92). Susan Greenfield has written that: “As we grow up and see the world

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<sup>13</sup> As I cannot conceive of its absence, consciousness is here considered unproblematic, and shall not be defined.

<sup>14</sup> This phrase is used frequently by scholars and is drawn from William James’ Principles of Psychology (1890). Full text of this book is available on the Internet at <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/Principles/>.

increasingly in the light of previous experiences, we develop a personalized inner world of private resources that increasingly act as a retaliatory buffer to the assault of the “booming, buzzing confusion” that previously poured into our brains unopposed” (2000:52). From our early childhood we experience an astonishing growth in associative brain activity that structures and organises the world in which we find ourselves. Early and extreme awareness of uncertainty is in most cases gradually tempered by a sense of emergent meaning, a growing experience of certainty. Greenfield describes early connections as “agile” and “unconstrained” (75). As time goes on, certain associations become more dominant than others and contribute to greater and greater synaptic sedimentation, that is, heightened experience of emergent certainty, which initially enables us to negotiate better the environments in which we find ourselves: “Gradually, we become better equipped with neuronal inner resources to interact with, rather than merely react to, the outside world” (69). This is a testament to the cumulative power of associative thinking, the sedimentation of synaptic strengthening. As Deborah Tannen writes: “The only way we can make sense of the world is to see the connections between things, and between present things we have experienced before or heard about (1993:14).<sup>15</sup> We make sense of the world as we negotiate our experience of uncertainty.

These processes of association and sedimentation lead to the emergence not only of meaning, but of associative, cumulative, adaptive, and uniquely-experienced *structures of meaning*. As they are understood here, “structures of meaning” can refer to anything from an abstract concept to a coffee-cup, from a classificatory framework to a building, from a code of social etiquette to a song, from a film to a friendship, from a colour to a sneeze. It is by examining the structuring of meaning, as “the way we perceive, create

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<sup>15</sup> As Greenfield reports, there are some interesting scientific investigations to support this hypothesis: “Within the brain, certain scientists such as the physicist Erich Harth and the physiologist Semir Zeki are starting to identify circuits that might underlie this interaction between the incoming sensory flood and preexisting associations, that is, the established connections between groups of neurons. In both cases, it is now well established that visual signals are not just relayed passively into the deep recesses of the brain and up into the cortex. Instead, there are also other connections that intercept this incoming stream of information, projecting it back down in the opposite direction to modify the way the incoming signal is relayed and thus how the world is perceived. We see the world in terms of what we have seen already” (2000:65).

and reiterate the relationships which give meaning to experience” (Marris 1996:29), that we are better equipped to assess the relational implications of that meaning. This is because structuring processes of meaning guide and circumscribe our interactions: “the process of structuring is, on the one hand, an overt patterning of behaviors in time and space and, on the other hand, a mental modeling of information about what interactive sequences apply to varying types of situations” (J. Turner 1988:149).

We have already shown that our understanding of uncertainty is here to be distinguished from behavioural uncertainty or fundamental uncertainty. It has also been demonstrated that our understanding of certainty is to be contrasted with what might be better termed certitude, or an absence of doubt. It is important now to differentiate our usage of “structure” in the term “structures of meaning” from the influential usage of the term in structuralism, particularly the structuralist anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss. For Lévi-Strauss, structure refers to the internal cohesiveness of formal relations that are inaccessible to observation unless revealed through the comparative transformations of similarity in apparently different systems (Lévi-Strauss 1977:18). This elusive structural cohesiveness, then, is assumed to be a constancy underlying observable formal variations, and is revealed only through sufficiently ‘deep’ analysis (136). Structure, then, is taken as ‘given’, an example of “the problem of invariance” (24). Structure is simply assumed to be there: “the link one establishes between things pre-exists ... the things themselves and serves to determine them” (Lévi-Strauss cited in Fabian 1983:57). Comparative analysis of observable diversity is the apparent road to revelation for the analysis of invariant structure. Diversity, however, necessarily renders invariant structure irrelevant as anything other than a signpost to synchronic<sup>16</sup>, repetitive, non-historical forms (see Fabian 1983:54-55). Understandings of these “structures” follows the characterisation of the term “structure” in building, engineering, anatomy, physiology, and botany, where it is used to express “something relatively fixed and permanent, even hard. The intensive development of notions of structure in physics

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<sup>16</sup> The claims of synchronic structural analysis, as Fabian (1983:52) demonstrates, simply hide the central strategy of eliminating Time and history as significant. Rather than being a distinction *of* Time, de Saussure’s diachrony and synchrony operates as a distinction *against* Time, as “Time is removed from the realms of cultural praxis and given its place in that of pure logical forms” (Fabian 1983:56).

..., added to the sense of deep internal relations, discoverable only by special kinds of observation and analysis” (Williams 1976:255). Within structuralism, then, little attention is paid to attitudes, dispositions, or normativities. Within this school of thought it is assumed, with no little influence from Freudian analysis, that the key to motivation in social interaction lies beyond consciousness, at the level of the unconscious, at the level of “deep structure”. This results in the subordination of people to formal relations.

Lévi-Strauss’ usage of the term “structure” is not, then, compatible with the needs of this research. As Kurzweil writes: “Lévi-Strauss does not deal with political conditions, because for him human behavior is preordained by unconscious forces beyond human control” (1980:27). We can perhaps come to a better grasp of the unsuitability of Lévi-Strauss’ conception of structure in our understanding of structures of meaning by acknowledging Jean Paul Sartre’s criticism of Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism. As Kurzweil notes:

In Sartre’s view, structuralism is remote from human existence and even denies its fundamental condition - that is, freedom. Consequently, structuralism presents a distorted and even morally suspect concept of this existence. Sartre considers the structuralist approach to be guilty of transforming men into static, timeless objects, related to things in the world and to other men in purely formal, objective and timeless ways. ... Sartre’s dialectic is between men and their surroundings and the processes through which men consciously act in relation to these surroundings. Lévi-Strauss’ dialectic is between men as social beings and men as the unconscious bearers of a universal order (derived from as yet undiscovered structures) (24).

We might reconfigure Sartre’s criticism and identify that Lévi-Strauss’ structures refer to a condition in which uncertainty is eliminated at the level of deep, permanent, unconscious infrastructure. This is analogous to what we identified earlier as the hypotheses of ergodicity or logical positivism, in which human life proceeds relative to an underlying, static, inherently predictable, and immutable environment to which we can gain access through the rationalist principles of the scientific method. Otherwise, as structure is presented in Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism, this order remains elusive.

In contrast to the invariant and deterministic structures of Lévi-Strauss, the term “structure” is here understood as *the emergent, cumulative, associative, adaptive, and uniquely-experienced relations constituted in and through our awareness of uncertainty and our experience of emergent certainty*. As in some structuralist discourse, structures

are here related to the neuronal patterns of the brain, although, unlike the neurological reductionism of structuralism (see Barrett 1997:143-144), these patterns are not fixed but are constantly changing and individually-negotiated. The universality of structures of meaning lies not in the structures, which are never fixed, but in the lawlike principles of awareness and emergence which allow for the emergence of structure with which we make sense of unique experience in social interaction. Structure is political insofar as our experience of structured meaning structures the meaning of our experience.

Structures of meaning make sense of our worlds, constituting a social order. Structures of meaning might also be understood as forms of knowledge, not inherent or immanent in the human mind, but here understood as “those organized and perpetuated ways of thinking and acting that enable us to direct ourselves to objects in our world (persons, things, and events) and see them as something” (E. McCarthy 1996:23). The structuring of knowledges and meanings provides for the constitution of our worlds, mitigating our experience of uncertainty. The function of knowledge (singular) as central to truth-seeking is relegated to a secondary position in the recognition that social reality exists in and through knowledge distribution. Knowledges (plural), as structures of meaning, are recognised as socially negotiated and socially distributed, as they also “provide a coherent and meaningful sense of reality (and unreality) for human beings, render[ing] and preserv[ing] a person’s or a group’s identity, and legitimat[ing] action and authority” (E. McCarthy 1996:5). Structures of meaning are not, then, merely outcomes of a social order, but key forces contributing to its constitution in and through negotiation (Williams 1981). Our experience of reality, as our experience of uncertainty and certainty, is an experience of structures of meaning: “both exist as real for us; both our worlds and our selves are spun from knowledges that render them real and meaningful” (E. McCarthy 1996:2).

Thanks to the dynamics of associative thinking and brain plasticity, structures of meaning are experienced as associative working assemblies<sup>17</sup>, or what Susan Greenfield refers to as “transient neuronal assemblies” (2000:181). Foucault’s concept of “discursive formation” is also instructive here, clearly speaking to the associative assemblage of meaning in our experience:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation* (Foucault 1972:38).

Reality is a constant and dynamic experience of interconnection and interrelationship. People, then, “acquire sets of cognitions that implicitly structure their perceptions and orientations to the world” (J. Turner 1988:105). These are organized assemblies of interpretive patterns that temper our experience of uncertainty, working assemblies of structures of meaning. It is important to note as well here that the assembly of connections is more important for our experience of structures of meaning than are the specific neuronal connections. Our consciousness is supported by adaptive and adapting patterns of association:

This is not only good news but is also utterly essential for our survival, as our brain connections are in flux throughout our life. If all our experience, memories and personality depended on very specific connections between particular neurones, then memory and personality would degrade far more dramatically and unpredictably than they actually do under normal circumstances (Robertson 1999:11).

In negotiation, then, structures of meaning make sense of our world, and we experience them as emergent, associative assemblies.

These associative assemblies are also cumulative, adaptive or “integrative”, and unique to each person’s experience. In asserting that they are cumulative we are simply referring to the character of synaptic strengthening as discussed earlier, that is, the processes of reinforcement or sedimentation: “With increasing frequency, previous associations start to dominate our interpretation an response to ongoing situations. The brain becomes less of a sponge and more of a yardstick in a turning world, retaliating in

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<sup>17</sup> Symbolic interactionists also speak of our experience of symbols, and the meanings and values to which they refer, as occurring in associative “clusters” (A. M. Rose 1962:10). Symbolic interactionism is discussed on pages 195-198.

an increasingly balanced dialogue with the outside world” (Greenfield 2000:54). Sedimented structures of meaning allow for the approximate repetition of structured and structuring interactions. This is extremely important in very practical ways, for “without structuring, every reencounter of individuals would involve so much interpersonal work that they would exhaust themselves” (J. Turner 1988:121). Furthermore, as Berger and Luckman put it: “Unless such sedimentation took place the individual could not make sense of his biography” (1966:85). By “adaptive” or “integrative” we mean that these emergent, associative, cumulative assemblies of structures of meaning also undergo a constant modification in the face of experience. As discussed earlier, meaning can never, then, be fixed: “there is an integration of newly acquired meanings with existing ones, a continuing modification. In this integrative sense, man’s behavior is a product of his life history, of all his experience” (A. M. Rose 1962:17). To say that these working assemblies of structures of meaning can never be fixed is not, however, to say that they cannot nonetheless be experienced as stable:

Throughout life we constantly modify our outlook and expectations, shifting the furniture around in the room, purchasing new items, and throwing out the old. ... Our world view, then, remains highly interactive and dynamic, but increasingly there is a theme, a continuity of style as we grow that is more personalized and more individual than any room (Greenfield 2000:58).

Thus, by virtue of the fact that our experience of meaning is emergent, associative, cumulative, and adaptive, our experience of meaning, our experience of synaptic connections, our experience of uncertainty, is also unique insofar as it is individually negotiated. This is a consequence of the dynamicism of our experience of uncertainty and certainty:

[N]o one, however close, occupies the same identical points in time and space throughout your life as you do. And as you live, memories pile up, and this accumulation of past scenarios, all stored within your brain, gives you a unique perspective from which to interpret the flood of sensations that bombard you every waking moment (Greenfield 2000:61).

## *The Isomorphism of Uncertainty and Certainty*

It has been suggested that emergent certainty is both constant and experienced in degrees of intensity. It has also been suggested that the emergence of certainty is synonymous with the emergence of meaning. It is now suggested that there is a direct correlation between our experience of certainty and our awareness of uncertainty. The work of Susan Greenfield would seem to support this hypothesis. Drawing from work concerning Alzheimer's disease, drug-induced states, and extreme emotional states, Greenfield tentatively suggests that the degree of emotion we experience at any one time is inversely proportional to the extent of prevailing neuronal assembly (2000:181). Not only is it suggested here that our experience of certainty and our awareness of uncertainty are linked, but it is suggested here, likewise tentatively, that our awareness of uncertainty at any time is inversely proportional to the extent of the prevailing neuronal assembly, that is, inversely proportional to our emergent and structured experience of certainty.

We might usefully refer, then, to *the isomorphism<sup>18</sup> of awareness of uncertainty and emergent certainty*. Our experience of uncertainty and certainty is both constant *and* dynamic, and constitutes “that familiar yet astonishing unified state we experience most of the time” (Greenfield 2000:42). As David Lowenthal writes: “Perception itself is never unalloyed: sensing, thinking, feeling, and believing are simultaneous, interdependent processes. ... The most direct and simple experience of the world is a composite of perception, memory, logic, and faith” (1975:111). We might get a broader appreciation of this “astonishing unified state” by turning to the field of social psychology. Donald Campbell draws attention to Murphy's “unity of perception and action”, or Sherif and

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<sup>18</sup> “Isomorphism” is here transposed and adapted from the mathematical sense of the term, where there is a one-to-one correspondence between the elements of two sets such that the result of an operation on elements of one set corresponds to the result of the analogous operation on their images in the other set (Pickett, ed. 2000). The term isomorphism is also used in structuralist semiology where it refers to “correspondences, parallels, or similarities in the properties, patterns or relations of a) two different structures; b) structural elements in two different structures and c) structural elements at different levels within the same structure” (<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem-gloss.html>). Powell and DiMaggio (1983) use the term “institutional isomorphism” to speak of a pattern of analogies between the workings of different organizations. Here the basic sense of mutual correlation is preferred.

Sherif's "unity of experience and behavior" (1988:127). Campbell also refers to the work of Asch, who draws upon the work of Wertheimer and Köhler in Gestalt psychology to re-introduce the concept of "isomorphism". For Wertheimer and Köhler the assumption of isomorphism speaks to the relation between physical brain events and the conscious experiences that accompany them. Asch extends the range of the term isomorphism to include "the relation between brain processes and their conscious accompaniments on the one hand and the actions of individuals on the other" (cited in Campbell 1988:127), understanding it, then, as the "isomorphism of experience and action". What is important for our purposes here is the proposition of the dynamic unity of consciousness, the interrelationship between certainty and uncertainty, the *isomorphism of awareness of uncertainty and emergent certainty*.

## Summary

This chapter initiates the discussion of negotiation. The understanding of negotiation presented here provides the basic set of assumptions with which we will approach the theory of enclosure, discussed in Chapter 9. Following the feminist perspective of Myra Jehlen, it was argued that negotiation provides us with the grounds for a radical comparativism. In other words, in and through this theory of negotiation we can come to a nuanced appreciation of the expansion of the Irish Music Rights Organisation as an example of social and political relations. The term 'negotiation' is used in a very specific sense here. Negotiation, it was argued, is constituted by four elements:

- The ever-presence of uncertainty
- The emergence of certainty
- Social Interaction
- Expectation

This chapter dealt with the first two elements of negotiation.

The ever-presence of uncertainty, it was argued, speaks to our constant and dynamic experience of uncertainty. Uncertainty in negotiation was distinguished from understandings of uncertainty that emphasise predictability and unpredictability.

Uncertainty is here understood as a fundamental condition of human life, an aspect of consciousness.

In contrast to foundationalist positions which equate certainty and certitude, the emergence of certainty here speaks to a fundamental condition of human life, and an aspect of consciousness. Like uncertainty, our experience of certainty is understood here to be constant and dynamic. It was argued, indeed, that our experience of certainty is suffused with our experience of uncertainty. By emphasising the role of synaptic transmission, it was argued that our experience of certainty is emergent, associative, cumulative, adaptive, individually negotiated, and structured. Furthermore, our experience of consciousness is an isomorphic experience of uncertainty and certainty.

In this chapter we have grounded an understanding of negotiation in neural research. This research has been used in order to emphasise the contingencies of our shifting yet structured experience in negotiation. In the following chapter we extend the analysis of negotiation to social considerations, all the while moving towards an appreciation of the relational implications of the expansion of the Irish Music Rights Organisation. The second two elements of negotiation, then, are social interaction and expectation.