

Diversity in Alternative Spiritualities: Keeping New Age at Bay¹

Adam Possamaï

Sociology, University of Western Sydney

There is a tendency in everyday life and in certain fields of knowledge to generalise every new and alternative spirituality under the label of New Age. This article will argue that the term New Age is a misnomer and does not reflect the panorama of rather different spiritualities, including neo-paganism and what I call Aquarian perennism and presentist perennism. Their differences and their respective genealogies with late nineteenth century 'occult' revival groups will be presented. By introducing these diverse groups and their genealogies, this paper will underline the diversity of beliefs and practices found in the family of Alternative spiritualities.

In the early stages of my doctoral research, I discovered that the term 'New Age' was highly problematic. On the first day 'prospecting' for voluntary participants, a shop owner (of what I would have called a New Age shop) told me explicitly that he had nothing to do with New Age and that if I wanted some help, I should go to the Theosophical Society. What is more confusing, is that for my honours thesis (Possamaï 1994), I interviewed members of this society who claimed that they had no connection with New Age. On top of this, during my first interviews, I realised that participants were negatively disposed to the term New Age. In 1996-1997, I interviewed 35 people who would 'commonly' be described as 'New Agers'. However, 71% of the participants criticised New Age, and 9%, even if positive towards it, did not consider themselves as 'New Agers'. Some negative comments were:

It's like a train labelled New Age and everybody's jumping on it. And it started off very good, a very good term. But now there's a lot of people out trying to make big money on it for all the wrong reasons.

And the other thing I find most irritating about the New Age movement is how gullible people are.

So I guess I'm a bit of a, you know I'm not your typical New Age, totally immersed in it sort of person [...]. I mean my personal feeling is that I like to keep my feet on the ground a bit [...].

The term not only lacks a clear denotation in the academic literature and

among the likes of the New Age spokespersons listed by York (1995, 48-88)², but creates problems when used in the field. Indeed, as Lewis realises:

For any one researching the new age movement, the reflections found in "Is New Age Dead?" raise several important issues. In the first place, because individuals, institutions, and periodicals who formerly referred to themselves as 'New Age' no longer identify themselves as such. Studies built around a distinction between New Age and non-New-Age become more complex (Lewis et al. 1992:2).

I would argue that the word, 'New Age' is dead but not what it signifies. But what does it signify? One movement (Heelas 1996; Haneggraff 1996), a dual movement New Age and neo-paganism (York 1995), or a diversity of sub-movements? This article will argue that what is referred as 'New Age' (and commonly used as a metonym) covers a diversity of spiritualities: neo-paganism, what I call Aquarian perennism and presentist perennism. All these diverse spiritualities are elements of what I call perennism, i.e. a syncretic spirituality which interprets the world as monistic (the cosmos is perceived as having its elements deeply interrelated), whose teleology for its actors is the Integral Self (actors work on themselves for personal growth), and whose soteriology is sought through gnosis (the way to develop oneself is through a pursuit of knowledge). This article is now introducing these three spiritualities.

Aquarian Perennism

Astrology has many branches and schools with a wide variety of astrological theories. One of them (which deals with nations and people) is called 'mundane astrology' by Cavendish (1972), or religious astrology by Le Cour (1995). Just as a chart can be drawn for an individual, so too for a society. Following Le Cour, some modern astrologers claim that the sun changes its zodiacal sign every 2160 years, according to the astrological law of the precession of equinoxes. This migration into another zodiac is supposed to create important modifications on earth; and just such a profound alteration is about to happen in the third millennium. The sun is leaving the zodiac of Pisces and will gradually enter the zodiac of Aquarius, affecting the behaviour and attitudes of every living creature. This is referred to as the coming of the Age of Aquarius.

Because of the sun's appearance during the vernal equinox in the zodiac of Aquarius, humankind will be influenced in attitude and behaviour under the Aquarian 'totem'. Aquarians in astrology are, in astrology's own positive interpretation, brilliant and inventive and also persistent and determined. They are greatly concerned to help others, pouring themselves out on the world. It is therefore deduced from this identity that the paradigmatic characteristics of the world in the Aquarian Age will be orderliness, constructiveness and intelligence. This belief in a positive change underlined a progressionist vision which was developed within the confines of the Theosophical Society in the 1930s. This Society is a cult movement (in the sense

used by Stark and Bainbridge 1985:29-30), started in 1875 and valorised the coming of a golden age in the very far future, much later than the coming of the Age of Aquarius. During the 1930s, through some cultural transaction between members of the Theosophical Society and astrologers, an offshoot occurred and innovated the idea of the Age of Aquarius (for more details, see Possamai 1998). However, this Aquarian eschaton is not followed by every perennist. Thus, the perennists valorising this coming will be conflated under the term Aquarian perennists.

Aquarian perennist work for the coming of the Age of Aquarius. They are not involved in political or social action, but they believe that in order to change the world into a better one, they first have to transform themselves. As the insider Trevelyan (1984:160) states, 'change man and you change society. Try to change society without the inner change in man, and confusion will be the sole result'. There is the belief that people have to work spiritually on themselves for the Age of Aquarius not only just to dawn, but to happen in earnest.

The extension of this belief in individual work to the collective is found in the notion of the 'critical mass'. "According to the critical mass theory, if enough people believe strongly in something, suddenly the idea will become true for everyone. This theory assumes that a reciprocity exists between one's individual consciousness and the collective or higher consciousness. [...] if a number of people -enough people to form a critical mass-concentrate on something, we may pass a threshold. Passing this threshold will have a spiritual and then a social impact on the whole world" (Peters 1991:77).

For Aquarian perennists waiting for the coming of the Age of Aquarius in the very near future (around AD 2000)³, it is important to ensure that the dawning will have full effect. There will be a burst of new energies, but for the planet to receive and deploy the energies in earnest, it is important to prepare the 'recipients' through work towards the critical mass. For those who believe that the Age of Aquarius will come too late for them to live it, work on critical mass can fast forward the advent of the Age (an idea already used in its original version by Le Cour (1995)). For those Aquarian perennists, it is important to change themselves quickly, and this, in turn, can transform the human consciousness within a single generation. As my informant Marilyn declares:

one of the principles around at the moment, the way we will save this planet and humanity is a thing called critical mass, which you've probably heard of, with the 100 monkey story. [...]. And the principle is that when any one or small group of a species gets an awareness, at a certain point in their numbers, [...] it will suddenly become available to all the rest, without them knowing it. And they will suddenly all start doing it.

Roger said:

If enough people are aligning spiritually, it will cause an effect, a resonance. A resonant effect, yes. And that's what happens, the more and more people...

In my sample, 17% of participants were concerned about the return of Christ. This Christ of second coming is not considered the son of God but rather a form of energy that will be spread among everyone (or the elect) on earth. For others, this new energy will be embodied in a person who is called Maitreya. Even in my small sample, there are various interpretations of the Aquarian parousia, and more might be expected in a larger sample. However, all of these believers equated this return with the Age of Aquarius and Critical Mass. Except for one, all view this coming positively. It is also striking to note that 46% of those who believe in the Age of Aquarius and Critical Mass also believe in the second coming of the Christ.

Neo-Paganism

Many Aquarian perennists do not consider themselves neo-pagan, and likewise, not all neo-pagan groups identify with what is called New Age. Neo-pagans are mainly interested in practising religions of the pre-Christian era, whether as a survival or a revival. These neo-tribes (in Maffesoli's (1988) understanding) are mainly focussed on the atavistic pagan religions and are generally not interested in post-pagan religions (with the possible exception of Hinduism). Whereas Aquarian Perennism is self-styled as an *awakening* in the future, neo-paganism thinks of itself more as a *re-awakening* of riches of the rituals and beliefs of the past (York 1995). Indeed, neo-pagans believe they are practising an ancient folk religion and focus on the past; the past, however, is not romanticised but serves mainly as a source of inspiration to be selectively drawn on⁴. Furthermore, they are not particularly interested in a New Age in the future (Aidan Kelly in Lewis and Melton 1992:138).

In general, neo-paganism may be summed up as comprising an animistic, pantheistic, and pluralistic religious orientation that is non-doctrinaire but employs traditional pagan metaphors (myths, foci, and rituals) or modern reconstructions of them as a means of celebrating a 'this-worldly' emphasis either on a solitary basis or with others of a like mind. It stresses self-responsibility, self-development, individual exegesis, and full freedom of self-determination, the experience of ritual and ecstasy, and an ecological preoccupation with the well-being of the planet regarded as a living entity. The interconnectedness of all life forms and the habitat is a central belief. Other concerns include tolerance, respect for diversity, healing, and the use of non-malevolent forms of 'magic'. Its ethics are pragmatic and grounded in the concept of honour. (York 1995:136).

None of the neo-pagans I interviewed believed in the critical mass or in the Age of Aquarius. Betty does not think that 'the world is going to change. I certainly don't think it's going to change just because of anything in 200 or 300 years'. In majority, they envision social change but only for the neo-pagan community. Fully understanding that there will be hostility to their aim and rituals, they try to bring alive a neo-pagan lifestyle for themselves and sympathisers. The focus is therefore not on a global change as it is for believers in the Age of Aquarius, but more a local

communal one. As Jennifer expressed her goals and hopes:

I'm still a member of the women's spiritual community and I'm very committed to it, and I want to live in a women's spiritual community ultimately. That's how I want to live, in a community with women. On a spiritual path. [...] I would love to do it now but it takes a lot of work and it's just not happening. And we're meeting regularly and trying to make it happen. I've been trying to make it happen for years.

Betty also wants to live in a neo-pagan community, but she admits that it is going to be difficult to attain her goal:

I don't think there's enough community any more. I like the sense of community that you're trying to build. I mean I don't think it's going to succeed completely because not everyone wants to be Wiccan [synonymous with neo-pagan]. And I don't think it's going to succeed because there are too many people.

I have found the points made by York (1995) and presented in table 1 clarify the distinctions between Aquarian perennism (what he calls New Age) and neo-paganism. The number in brackets refers to the page number of York (1995).

Table 1: *Aquarian Perennism versus Neo-Paganism*

Aquarian perennism	Neo-paganism
'Pursues a transcendent metaphysical reality' (2) 'Innovation - Awakening' (2). 'Global transformation' and a 'new planetary culture' (162-163).	'Seeks an immanent locus of deity' (2) 'Links to the past - Re-Awakening' (2) No search for global transformation <i>per se</i> (162-163). More community oriented (162-163) Nature based religion (200) Goddess worship (200) Ceremony and rituals (230)

In table 1, points 1, 2 and 3, on the Aquarian perennist side, refer to the Age of Aquarius and its expected global transformation; on the neo-pagan side, as seen by my participants: these points refer to the desire of establishing a neo-pagan community. Points 5, 6 and 7 refer to a set of words that neo-pagans use and that were presented by my informants. However, an important remark has to be made about the Goddess worship (point 6). The goddess (the personification of nature) is used as a metaphor of nature. 'She is in the world, of the world, the very being of the world' (Luhmann 1994:49). She is, in other words, a powerful metaphor for monism. Thus neo-pagans distinguish themselves from other perennist sub-groups by using the term Goddess as a powerful metaphor for monism.

If Aquarian perennism comes from the Theosophical Society's stream of thought, neo-paganism must also be located in relation to modern occultism. By modern occultism I refer to the movement created by Eliphas Lévi, the pseudonym of Alphonse-Louis Constant (1810-1875) who fought against materialism in France and named it Occultism. He was also a romantic, a communist, and a one-time Catholic priest. After the XVIIIth century, the study of the Kabala was losing its vitality outside the Jewish community. Eliphas Lévi reintroduced this mysticism to his contemporaries. If the Theosophical Society was mainly based on Westernised Eastern doctrines, Occultism was strongly influenced by the Kabala. Another important figure of early Occultism is Papus, the *nom de plume* of Gérard Encausse (1865-1916). This movement attracted people of apparently diverse personalities who did not condemn scientific progress or modernity but who integrated science in their teachings against materialism. They planned to elucidate all the mysteries lying in the esoteric traditions and wanted to unveil all the secrets. Many new initiatory orders were created from this movement, e.g. the Golden Dawn by Samuel Mathers, an order strictly for men.

Among contemporary neo-pagans, cabbalistic magic, high magic and occultism often appear together with neo-paganism. This association has caused dissension: however the link with occultism has always been there (Hume 1995:6). T.M. Luhrmann (1994:41-44) traces the roots of neo-paganism in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an initiatory society founded in 1887. This group belonged to what I understand as Occultism. The Hermetic Order fragmented and one of the new groups, formed in 1922 by Dion Fortune⁵, was called the Society of the Inner Light. This society influenced new groups coming out of the Occultist stream, but they were not yet identifiably neo-pagan. Luhrmann (1993:1994) calls the groups influenced by Dion Fortune, the Western Mysteries groups and they see themselves as the continuation of the mystery traditions of the West, e.g. Eleusis, Mithraism, Druidism. According to Luhrmann, the groups demand far more intellectual engagement than witchcraft (which 'comes from the guts and loins', see below) does. The practitioners of Western Mysteries are grouped in fraternities or lodges, tend to be Christian, and often work on cabbalistic principles. They appear to be a contemporary form of modern Occultism.

Further fragmentations of Occultism, from the 1940s, saw the emergence of exactly the sort of neo-paganism under investigation. Gerald Gardner, who had met Aleister Crowley (from two occultist groups: the Golden Dawn and the O.T.O.), published fictitious ethnography of contemporary witches mainly in the late 1940s and the 1950s. He claimed to have been initiated and had revitalised Witchcraft (i.e. neo-paganism) in the Western world. For Gardner, witches had ancient knowledge and powers handed down through generations. This invention of tradition was claimed to be a revival of ancient nature religions. Witchcraft was organised in covens run by women called 'high priestesses' who presided over rites of initiation for new members of the coven⁶.

Inside the neo-pagan movement which for Lynne Hume (1995) addresses the modern concerns of ecology and feminism, there is also the Feminist Spirituality Movement (also called Feminist witchcraft and Female Divinity by Wendy Griffin (1995)). Its adherents and interpreters may be witches and/or goddess worshippers. This movement focuses on women's nature and women's experiences of the sacred. It characterises dominant forms of organisation of society as phallocracy, and urges other modes be adopted. They mainly look for models in societies where interrelatedness is interpreted as being the primary value, as supposed of Palaeolithic and Neolithic societies. For example, Eisler (1990) uses Cretia⁷ (before the Aryan invention which has, according to her, slain the people worshipping the goddesses peacefully) as the epitome of a perfect society, which she calls a gylany⁸. But eyes are not turned exclusively to the past: the movement also searches for a new model of society that remedies the supposed spiritual lack of Western society in indigenous cultures (e.g. Green 1992:237).

There is the assumption that the emergence of the feminine principle - *the Goddess* - will foster an alternative kind of political system, particularly if global emphasis is on interconnectedness rather than on hierarchy; indeed, for Rebecca Gordon (1995) there can be 'inextricable links between politics and spirituality, particularly feminist politics'. If neo-paganism celebrates the god (the male embodiment of monism, also called the Horned god) and the goddess, feminist spirituality focuses its ritual exclusively on the goddess and participants are only women. The Feminist Spirituality Movement covers many groups with different ideals and not all of them consist of homosexuals and radical separatists. However, the Feminist Spirituality Movement has its counter-part, the Radical Faerie Movement (Rodgers 1995) which is a distinctly gay spirituality.

All of these varieties of neo-pagan spirituality⁹, we have seen, have at least genealogical links to modern occultism. It is this lineage and its effects on belief and practice that further distinguish neo-pagans from Aquarian perennists.

Presentist Perennism

At issue among perennists is orientation to history. As we have seen, Aquarian perennists orientate themselves to the future¹⁰, while neo-pagans orientate themselves to the past. In this section still, a third sub-perennist type will be introduced, that of presentist perennism. This is the perennist group which has no concern with the past, no vision of a succession of age: it is perennism which focuses exclusively on the present.

Several of my informants were anxious to dissociate themselves from Aquarian history at least. Harry is one of them:

The Age of Aquarius, [...] it seems to be some kind of technical term to explain an astrological period. I don't know enough about astrology. There seems to be a fair amount of dispute and discussion amongst the astrologers as to exactly when it's going to happen. [...]. I believe in symbols. I believe in metaphors. I

believe in metaphors and metaphysics is what I believe in. I don't believe in facts. I don't believe in history. I don't believe in those things.

Sarah finds a certain arrogance in Aquarian history. I asked her what she thought about the Age of Aquarius and she answered:

Sarah: I think it's arrogant to think that things get better as we go along and progress. We don't progress. It's cyclic [...]. I think we're all heading for another kind of spiritual time. But we could lose it and we probably will. Things seem to be cyclic. You get so far and then you go back and as I said there's nothing we've got that I don't think that people have had before at certain times and in different cultures. Egyptian culture, Mao culture. It may be expressed in different ways, maybe not. I don't know, is there a word for being time centric?

Interviewer: Time centric?

Sarah: Rather than ego centric. Yeah well I think we do. [...] Well you know how you can be ethnocentric and think that your culture's got it the best? [...] Yeah we can suffer from being time centric, but I don't know if there's a word for it.

Sue is an astrologer and uses astrology among other means as a psychological tool to understand herself, to reach self knowledge. Since she has mastered this discipline, she has started to do meditation. She teaches astrology and also draws charts. Often, people ask her about their future:

I've often found it difficult to understand people who are obsessed with knowing their future. Because surely, I mean you've got to live in the present. This is what I try to do with meditation.

Later in the interview, knowing I was interviewing a professional astrologer, I asked her about the Age of Aquarius, and she explained what it was about. But at a certain stage in the interview, I asked her if this change would be better for her. Her answer made it clear that she is not an Aquarian of the kind described in the section above:

I don't know. I haven't thought about that much actually. I mean I think that's probably what New Ageism is all about. You know, en masse. I'm very non-global in the way I think often.

Harry, Sarah and Sue, sceptical of historical knowledge, despairing of historical progress or critical of orientation to the future, all live mainly in the present. They provide us with a key to understanding presentist perennism as outlined below.

Some of my interviewees express interest in Aquarian perennism, neo-paganism

or feminist spirituality, but they do not expect the whole world to change as they follow their interests. At most, they hope for small changes in local places. They do not think of bringing a past world into the present. They are mainly concerned with developing their divine spark but often in an altruistic way, helping others, hoping to build a better world without transforming it radically as opposed to the critical mass supported by Aquarian perennists. Further, two understandings of the concept of critical mass were discovered in my field work and in this lays a factor of differentiation between Aquarian perennists and presentist perennists. The term, 'critical mass' includes two major variations that are not noted in the literature; while they both aim for change, their methods for, and conceptions of change differ: one method is based on meditation and aims at a change in consciousness and spirit, the other one is based on social action and aims at a change in the social paradigm. **THE WORK FOR CRITICAL MASS FOR MEDIATION (CMM)** refers to the belief that externally supplied energy may be harnessed by a certain mass of people meditating, or being transformed into integral selves, and this will change the world as explained above.

THE WORK FOR CRITICAL MASS THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKING (CMSN) does not refer to an unconscious shift brought by meditation but more to a paradigmatic shift in social life. It follows the description by Marilyn Ferguson (1981) of the Aquarian Conspiracy; is a qualitative change in everyday life. This can happen by a networking of many networks aimed at social transformation. It is called a conspiracy by Ferguson, and it is for her a revolution of a new style. It aims at changing the consciousness of a critical number of people to provoke a renewal of the society as a whole. However, the changes have first to happen inside individuals which in turn will operate change in a larger scale. The aim is to provoke a 'paradigm shift' in social structures and practices in the sense used by Thomas Kuhn. The interviewee Julia presents her view of critical mass brought by social action:

Western culture's becoming more and more alienated from a spiritual approach and a caring approach. But on the other hand you've got all these small community groups springing up all over the place that are quite strong and quite active and quite committed. And they're a substitute in a sense for what we lack in the Western culture at large. And I think those small community groups or spiritual groups or whatever they are, are really having a huge effect on people's lives, because without them we'd all be stranded. [...] Just general community groups where people will get together and try and work on a certain problem, like the Save the Albert Park Group. Or there's a group that I belong to [...]; and we talk about different social issues and things that are of a concern to people, like the closing of Fairlea Prison, the exploitation of animals to make drugs. So it's a sharing of knowledge and it's happening on a small scale in a sense. You know we're not using the World Wide Web. We're talking to each other. And I'll talk to you and you'll go and talk to someone else and so on and so forth. I think that that sort of knowledge is not even really recognised largely in mainstream culture, but I think it's critical. It's a critical way of

exchanging knowledge, and I think it's a lot more influential than we would think it is on the surface. Just handing someone a brochure about someone. It's like that concept, I don't know who coined it now, but a butterfly flaps its wings in Guatemala or somewhere [...] and there's a tidal wave in Tokyo or something. And I think there's some truth to that, just on a community level. You just spread the word. [...]

CMA refers to an action in the 'collective unconscious' (to use Jung). It works on universal energies coming from above which, if well channeled and tamed, will speed up the coming of the Age of Aquarius and render it fully effective. On the other hand, CMSN works through building on social change under way in everyday life, especially in a variety of social movements. It operates by the increment of small actions. Work in and on one's community affects other communities, and from this, a snowball effect (or a butterfly effect) takes shape little by little. In my sample, Aquarian perennists were all found to favour CMA and almost half of the presentist perennists CMSN.

Even if presentist perennists see cycles in history, they focus on the present, trying not to be 'time centric'. In some ways, they are like the neo-pagans who are also concerned with the local, and in a sense, they concentrate their ritual activity on the present. But neo-pagans still valorise history (or 'invented' history). This is where they differ from presentist perennists.

A dichotomy raised by Gilbert Durand (1996:166) and inspired by Paracelsus (an esotericist) can shed some light on these presentist perennists. Time is multiple and can be classified under two forms, the objective time (*Wachsendzeit*) and the subjective time (*Krafzeit*). The *Wachsendzeit* is the time followed by clocks, astronomy and meteorology. This time is universal in a mechanical world and can be measured objectively, whereas the *Krafzeit* is locally placed in every human being. It is the destiny of each one of us and it is for some the time fixed by God (or Goddess). Further philosophical discussion of this distinction is not the objective of this section. However, the dichotomy helps us distinguish presentist perennists from Aquarian perennists and neo-pagans. Aquarian perennists and neo-pagans by positively valorising the future or the past include in their *Zeitgeist* an objective universal time. However, presentist perennists deal with the time of their destiny, their subjective time, their *Krafzeit* and do not feel a strong concern about universal time. For some of my informants (48%), there is no use in speculating about the past or the future, but only on their subjective time, now.

This notion of subjective time (or eternity) is not new in itself. It even goes back to Plotinus for whom time represented a prison for human beings (P. Davies 1995:24). It is time as experienced by mystics in their peak experiences, and is also described by Eliade (1959) as the myth of 'eternal return', a transcending time that surpasses birth and death. However, these are expressions of subjective time in which the subject escapes the everyday mundanity. For presentist perennists, subjective time is inner-worldly and lends significance to the everyday. In this sense, presentist

perennism is a very new development in perennism (in Western societies) in the sense that they appropriate a 'divine' time in their everyday life and try to live it.

The Perennist Triad

The Theosophical Society has engendered Aquarian perennism, while Occultism has inspired neo-paganism. These two perennist groups were formed in the 1930s and 1940s: they were not an outgrowth of the 1960s counter-culture movements.

Presentist perennists are not connected to a specific esoteric movement but, I argue, have grown out of a cultural shift in industrial societies. Post-industrial societies (including their counter-culture movements) are defined partly in terms of deep cultural changes occurring within them. These include declining belief in the idea of progress, radical individualism, and fluidity of movement between sub-cultures. Presentist perennism, even though it borrows eclectically from earlier esotericism, is to be understood as an expression, in the field of spirituality of emergent post-industrial or post-modern culture.

Jameson's (1984) observation about the postmodern world, that 'we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic [...]', helps establish the point about the ethos of postmodernity. Bauman's (1997:89) notion that to live in a postmodern time is to live in a continuous present (a present severed from history) lends further authority to the argument about the characteristics of postmodernity. Maffesoli (1996:59) characterises postmodernity in terms of its ethic of 'the instant' and even describes (Maffesoli 1996:100-101) the postmodern focus on the present as intemporal time, an *illus tempus*. This appears to be very close indeed to subjective time experienced by presentist perennists.

There are perhaps other perennist spiritualities. The Rainbow Warriors described by Buenfil (1991) may represent another type. These warriors mix beliefs in the coming of the Age of Aquarius with neo-pagan perspectives and focus more on a deep ecological spirituality. Their Age of Aquarius is the 'ecotopia millennium'. Is this a spirituality blending the ideal-types of Aquarian perennism and neo-paganism? Or is it a new type of spirituality more focussed on ecology than any of the other types? In this article I can only raise the questions, and concentrate on the three ideal-types of perennism found in my sample. Their characteristics are summarised in table 2.

Table 2: Summary of the Differences Among Perennist Sub-Types

	Aquarian perennism	Neo-paganism	Presentist perennism
Eschatology	Age of Aquarius and critical mass by meditation (CMM) (universal)	Re-enactment of pagan life-style (local).	None.
Perception of time	Objective	Objective	Subjective
Specificities	Some wait for the Aquarian parousia.	Focus on rituals, ceremonies and Goddess.	Some work on a Critical Mass through Social Networking (CMSN).
In connection to modernity(on the level of their cosmological discourses)	Modern (valorisation of progress, e.g. the Age of Aquarius)	Anti-modern (valorisation of pre-Christian vales)	Post-modern (valorisation of presentist values)

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Notes

1. I would like to thank Rowan Ireland for his helpful comments and suggestions.
2. York (1995) has analysed the spokespersons of NAS in a descriptive way and discusses the fact that some of these people tend to eschew the designation 'New Age' (York 1995:49). It is not my intention to summarise the works by Ram Dass, Edgar Gayce, Ruth Montgomery, Shirley MacLaine, etc; for such an analysis, see York (1995).

3. There is a debate on the exact date for the coming of the Age of Aquarius: between the 1960s and 2160.
4. For a detailed account of the use of history as a source of inspiration, see Badone (1991), Bowman (1993), Harrow (1994) and Luhrmann (1994:252-253). And as one of my participants, Judith, declared about the past: 'I'm very much about utilising the best of everything. I believe we live in this society and there's no point in actually trying to recreate something that in all honesty never did really exist. It's an idealised image of something that we see as simple in the past. Well it's no more simple'.
5. Her real name was Violet Mary Firth (1891-1946) and her motto was *Dio No Fortuna*, 'God, not fortune' (Riffard 1990: 878).
6. However, among the Western Mysteries and Witchcraft groups, Luhrmann (1994) identifies also ad hoc ritual groups and 'non-initiated' paganism. Ad hoc ritual magic groups (Luhrmann 1994:74-81) comprise those who have discovered one another in networks and have devised their own rituals. These groups are not of the Western Mysteries lineage, and they do not call themselves witches. 'Non-initiated' paganism (Luhrmann 1994:82-91) is a term used by Luhrmann to include the meetings and rituals that she attended which were open to uninitiated members. The point of these gatherings was to understand and to develop paganism. 'Non-initiated' paganism appears to be mainly a networking form of neo-paganism.
7. This vision is romanticised if the myth of the Minotaur is taken into consideration. Each year, young people were sacrificed to the Minotaur until Theseus arrived. As for Democracy in Athens, Gylany was for Cretians and not for slaves and foreigners.
8. A term created by Eisler (1990:105) to express a society in which women and men are equal, in which there is a link and not a rank among people.
9. For an extended list of neo-pagan sub-groups, see Hume (1997:52-55).
10. They also deconstruct history in terms of Zodiacal ages (see Possamaï 1998).