

Marcel Mauss and the cultural history: a contemporary rescue¹

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Marcel Mauss y la historiografía culturales: un rescate contemporânea

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Abstract: This article discusses Marcel Mauss as historical subject. This discussion is based on understanding his ideas in the ideas of other thinkers of the period such as Levi-Strauss (2004), Stockingjr (2004); Montandon (2011); Castro (2005) and Martins (2005). From this point of view, it analyzes the context of production of his essay "The Gift" and how his ideas are articulated in the formation and interpretation of human societies. We use historiography for interpreting different times and historical productions in addition to the inter-relationship between theory and practice applied to the understanding of the historical daily life. Therefore this study seeks to rescue and understand the "dimensions" of hospitality, in its initial conception, and in today's world, beyond the idea of "continuum", discussed and propagated by contemporary historiography.

Keywords: Hospitality. Dimensions. Historiography. Marcel Mauss. Contemporary World.

Resumo: Este artigo discute Marcel Mauss como sujeito histórico. Essa discussão baseia-se em perceber suas ideias nas ideias de outros pensadores do período tais como, Lévi-Strauss (2004), Stockingjr (2004); Montandon (2011); Castro (2005) e Martins (2005). Busca assim, analisar o contexto de produção de seu "Ensaio sobre a Dádiva" e como suas ideias se articulam na formação e interpretação das sociedades humanas. Utiliza-se a historiografia para a interpretação dos diversos tempos e produções históricas analisadas, além da inter-relação entre teoria e prática aplicada na compreensão do cotidiano histórico. Para tanto, busca resgatar e perceber as "dimensões" da hospitalidade na sua concepção inicial e no mundo atual, além da ideia de "permanência", discutida e propagada pela historiografia contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: Hospitalidade. Dimensões. Historiografia. Marcel Mauss. Mundo Contemporâneo.

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Resumen: Este artículo discute Marcel Mauss como sujeto histórico. Esta discusión se basa en la realización de sus ideas sobre las ideas de otros pensadores de la época, como Lévi-Strauss (2004), Stockingjr (2004); Montandon (2011); Castro (2005) y Martin (2005). Así que buscar, analizar el contexto de producción de su "Ensayo sobre el don", y cómo sus ideas se articulan en la formación y la interpretación de las sociedades humanas. Utilizamos el método historiográfico para la interpretación de diferentes tiempos y producciones históricas analizadas, además de la interrelación entre la teoría y la práctica aplicada a la comprensión del diario histórico. Por lo tanto, trata de rescatar y entender las "dimensiones" de la hospitalidad, en su concepción inicial, y en el mundo actual, más allá de la idea de "continuum", discutido y propagada por la historiografía contemporánea.

Palabras clave: Hospitalidad. Dimensiones. Historiografía. Marcel Mauss. Mundo Contemporáneo.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to rescue the historical moment of the publication of the essay "The Gift", first released in France, in 1924, and analyse how its theoretical proposal may be interpreted in the daily actions of the contemporary world.

In this sense, the objective is to understand how a theoretical vision proposed by anthropology has managed to survive in this time of oblivion regarding the natural ties between people; and against a backdrop of increasing interference of the state and the market in the social relationships built since then

Based on historiography and documentary methods, it was possible to gather a wealth of information to understand Mauss as a historical man linked to his daily life events. Thus, the key question is: Who is Marcel Mauss as a historical figure? It is a study wherein the historical interpretation is set forth, linked to the dimensions proposed to the understanding of hospitality, to a better knowledge of the individual and the time of Marcel Mauss. The dimensions of Hospitality in the contemporary globalized world, and the multiple interpretations around this topic are analyzed and depicted. This analysis, as mentioned, is based on historico-bibliographical research, i.e. on documental sources produced about the period by the thinkers analysed here.

In this regard hospitality is considered as: original virtue. Hospitality is, thus, one of the oldest virtues, it has a chronological anteriority, as well as logic and anthropological; it is omnipresent to an extent that it passes for natural instinct and, sometimes, becomes a national character (Montandon, 2011:882). Hospitality, in this sense, presents itself as a prominent feature for the existence of culture. That hospitality is also observed in the identification of the "self" in the image of the "other" and, thus, the acceptance of the otherness. This shows how man in his daily life identifies himself with the group, thus shaping his collective memory, and understanding his passage from "nature to culture".

The herein concept of Dimensions is envisaged as everything which unfolds from that relationship of perception of the "self" in the image of the "other", revealing, in this case, the

notion of culture itself. In this regard, Lanna (2000: 173) interpreted Mauss's book "The Gift" as "[...] political dimension of gift exchange". But the theoretical vision proposed by Mauss, in Claude Lévi-Strauss's perspective, understands "dimension" as the realm of everyday life and this will be the element susceptible of interpretation. Thus:

The total social fact, therefore proves to be three-dimensional. It must make the properly sociological **dimension** with its multiple synchronic aspects; with the historical or diachronic **dimension**; and finally, with the physiopsychological **dimension**. (Lévi-Strauss. In: Mauss, 2003: 24, [emphasis added]).

Among other interpretive sources, this paper builds on the English version of Fornier's (2005) biography of Mauss. In other moments the theoretical exposition is used, following the historiographical proposal of Le Goff; Nora (1976), Braudel (1978), and also Lévi-Strauss (2004), Stockingjr (2004), Montandon (2011), Castro (2005), and Martins (2005).

This theoretical exposition, drawing on the ideas of the above-mentioned authors, drives the methodological construction of this paper. In different occasions it shows that the construction of Mauss's interpretive idea is under discussion in the period proposed in this analysis. Different authors have built similar mechanisms of interpretation of the society in the period. Therefore, they aim to show that the "historical subject", in this case Mauss, is a result of the historical moment to which he belongs.

2 TO DO HISTORY

The historic document is in itself a tool for analysis and its interpretation cannot be reduce to a formal textual content analysis. The classic moments of the development of historical interpretation, still in Fustel de Coulanges's "The Ancient City" time, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, doing history was analyzing the written content and search for the supposed truth in it. Heroes, their deeds and the chronology associated with them, were the backbone of historiographical interpretation.

In fact, in a moment that History revives as a modern science searching its own theoretical critique, the interpretative approach arises. In that period, throughout the nineteenth century, the document was considered just for its literal content. Scientificity, as proposed by the European Technological Revolution, did not allow for the observation of binding features, i.e. everything possessed truth in its interpretation, isolating the written text from its production context

It was a group of French historians, Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel, and the so-called 'Annales' school, in the early decades of the twentieth century, who proposed the dismissal of Eurocentrism, the end of the closed interpretation and the vision focused on heroic deeds and not in man itself. They started to consider a "document" besides

its obvious meaning. In this sense, Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora applied this new historiographical approach as presented in the work: *History. New problems; new approaches and new objects* (Le Goff; Nora, 1976).

In the cultural atmosphere wherein the 'Annales' school flourished, anthropology also sought for new interpretive paths. Previously, it had been considered a science which would validate the domination of the industrial powers (Castro, 2005), the opening of markets and the cultural expansion of dominating peoples. This perspective was also found in the interpretation of the intense migrant flows to the urban industrialized areas, in an attempt to justify the pockets of poverty in urban areas, i.e. what Emile Durkheim, Mauss's uncle, called, whilst interpreting France's everyday life, "the moral emptiness of the French Third Republic" (Rodrigues, 1978: 08). In this atmosphere, the news coming from peoples who had been, until then, virtually isolated from the western world, become exotic and fascinating novelty for a new, ascending bourgeoisie.

Sir James George Frazer's works, summarized in the "Golden Bough", first released in 1890, reached in the 1920s an unimaginable success given its scientific nature. Frazer collected ethnographic data and turned them into appealing reading to that ascending bourgeoisie.

The comparison between different cultures, the classifications and definition of supposed stages of cultural evolution of all human groups, in that time called Evolutionism or Social Evolutionism, depicted, and supposedly confirmed, the Eurocentric and technical nature of the last steps of the evolution against which the human groups were compared: a manifestation of the constituted power.

Mauss also collected those ethnographic narratives and, similarly to Frazer, he was an armchair ethnographer, however his production, in which the essay "The Gift" (1923-1924) stands out, did not sought positivist answers or absolute cultural truths, but rather an interpretive approach.

This profile, differently from Frazer's, built an interpretive possibility of society which has been used until today, to understand the patterns and the social invisible ties. In Godbout's (1999) vision, it is the third paradigm, opposed to the market and to the state, and when the "[...] quality of the ties between the members [of an organization] is missing, nothing works" (Godbout, 1999: 99).

Mauss wrote "The Gift" between the two world wars, a period in which cultural and social situations, never before imagined in the human species, have become more frequent, as mass killing, for example.

The environment of large cities emerged as the space of the new manifest sociality. The thinkers of the so-called Chicago School, in the United States, make this context their laboratory. Urban groups, mainly the excluded, gained a voice and appear on reports and analyses developed by these thinkers. The fragmentation of the social fabric is evident, it is a new society organizing and transforming its initial reason of existence. The Chicago School

gave rise to the expression "definition of the situation", i.e., if people define situations as real they become real in their consequences, thus becoming a collective memory (Becker, 1996).

In this fragmentation and reorganization of contemporary society hospitality can be considered as a phenomenon of social morphology (Gotman, 2011: 80). In "The Gift", Mauss argues that the social life is organized around a constant "giving-receiving-giving back", observing that these obligations are organized in specific ways in each case. The exchanges are conceived and practiced in different times and places, in various ways, from personal retribution to the distribution of tributes.

[...] hospitality is a hospitality among peers, and not a charitable hospitality to inferiors. Because what is at stake in these voluntary or mandatory exchanges of things that are never fully detached from those who exchange is, neither more nor less than social cohesion, the glue that holds society together. (Gotman, 2011: 77-78).

Contemporarily, we notice the rupture of the traditional social cohesion. Mauss's epoch becomes both the time of men who govern and capitalize themselves, and of a state which constraints and organizes that model of governability.

The question that arises refers again to the content of culture as susceptible of measurement, with commoditization. This process generates a power relationship since what is "captured" from someone becomes, indirectly, another one's possession, i.e. the recognition of the "self" in the image of the "other".

This collection of tangible and intangible culture of the new groups was the base for the production of the theoretical information analyzed by anthropologists. This way of working gave rise to the expression "armchair anthropology" (Castro, 2004).

Mauss, like Morgan, Tylor and Frazer, was an armchair ethnographer, but his erudition – such as knowing ten languages already extinct – made of him a distinguished researcher among his predecessors. His way of analysis broke with the proposal of "cultural evolutionism", creating an ethnography that sought to understand and not only get standard and easily assimilated answers. The documents that Mauss used had been collected by individuals that were standing out in the new approach to documentary methods and anthropological analysis. Franz Boas was one of those new anthropologists that began to consider the intangible dimensions in social relations, in the studied groups (Stockingjr, 2004).

In this respect there was a certain non-measurable or quantifiable symbolism, i.e. a direct opposition to the technicism proposed until then, for the interpretation of cultures. A technicism which reflected the language of the machines, organizing and controlling people in urban environments increasingly rationalized and commoditized.

Mauss comes to learn that "symbolism is fundamental to social life" (Martins, 2005: 46). Things have meanings and values when symbolism becomes attached to them. They translate values and everyday needs into collective memories of belonging, justifying what was called "total social fact".

2.1 Marcel Mauss: contemporary notions

The environment and seasonal variations influence the behavior of the human groups and the way they perceive themselves in daily life. Mauss shows this influence in his study of the Eskimo: “the seasons are not the direct determining cause of the phenomena they occasion; they act, rather, upon the social density that they regulate” (Mauss, 2003: 502).

In fact, in the contemporary world, the reactions and the manifestations of social groups solidify upon expressions and wants of the collective, which may have conditioned rhythms, similar to those that seasonal variations induced in the so-called “archaic communities” (Mauss, 2003). This notion of space and territory as driving tools of social and cultural reality, was also discussed by Fernand Braudel (1978). The Mediterranean world discussed and interpreted by this historian can also be found in the words of the anthropologist Mauss. How to think about time, in its social function, without understanding the underlying mechanism used in the understanding of geographical space? Would this mechanism be a primal feature of the expression of collective reality of the human groups?

Space, time, and culture become intertwined elements forming a broad web of meanings in the construction of everyday cultural reality of the social groups. Mauss and his contemporaries note this interpretive shift towards everyday reality and argue that there are no isolated theoretical constructions, i.e. analyzing a social group just through a theoretical look at their society is to sacrifice important aspects of that analysis.

Society has started to be regarded as a result of a “process”; actions have consequences which unfold beyond the space-time horizon of the researcher’s analysis. With this regard, “The Gift”, in its central questioning seems to build on the assumption of social continuity, i.e. the endless “process” of actions and “exchanges”, aimed at the existence and permanence of the group and its needs.

In the contemporary expression, that “continuum”, by virtue of the new reality of formation, is replaced by other expressions and meanings. Every set of previous actions that built the social continuum may be replaced by external factors to the original process. For example, exchanges of gifts, which Martins (2005: 55) calls “hospitality”, represent an expression in which the obligation of “giving” is suppressed by the symbolic value assigned to a tangible good, which can be measured and valued. In the contemporary world, wherein everything is measurable, the state and the market assume functions and become the external “wall” to cover the primal construction of the original social amalgamation.

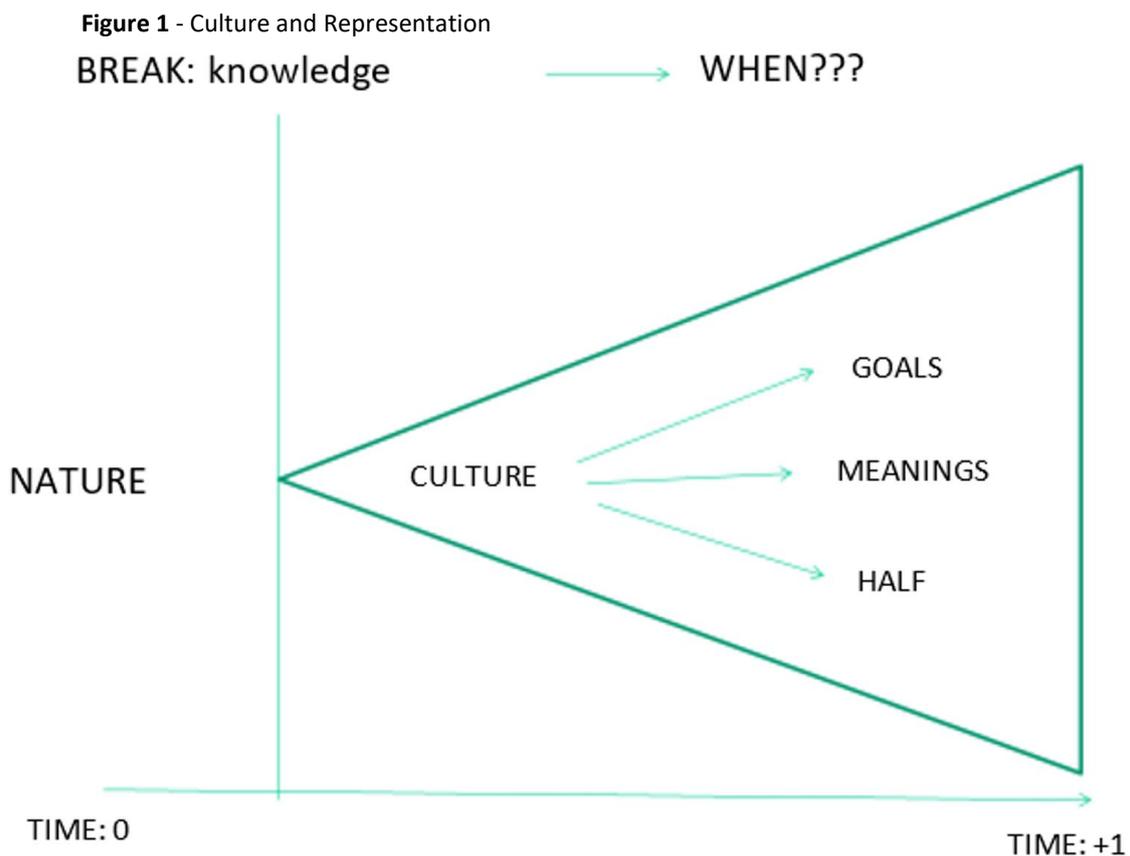
Lília Junqueira (2005), in her analysis of Baudrillard’s book “The System of Objects”, written in 1968, reminds that the relationship between men and objects in contemporary society may be perceived by two distinct features. The first refers to the technical pattern, i.e. the constitution of object itself; and the second is the meaning assigned to that object from what is proposed by the social system. Baudrillard, recognizes that the object is adapted to “an order and a system” (apud Junqueira, 2005: 148). If “hospitality” can be envisaged as a

“gift” (Martins, 2005), the “gifted thing” becomes the original rupture of the analyzed system, put forward by Mauss. The gift itself becomes a representation of the society that have made it.

In the original context of “The Gift”, the object represents the strengthening of ties between peers and guarantees the continuity of group’s social relations. In the contemporary world the object is represented by its “value of use”, rather than for its fetishism aspect, proposed by Marx when the object was still exclusively considered by its “technological pattern” (Junqueira, 2005).

2.2 On the nature of the object

The object as representative of “function”, or functionalism, is one of the elements that embody aspects of the culture of a group (Miller, 2010:75). Their representation as part of the cultural system follows the overall social expression.



Source: The author (2015)

As depicted in Figure 1, it is not possible to identify the precise moment of rupture of the original pattern man-nature. The process is observed between the time “0” and time “+1”, we know it happened, but it is not possible to measure it. Such fact relates to the formation

of culture and its materialization which occurred by the “construction” of the object, its symbolism and its relationship with the environment and the group to which it belongs.

The object and its function of use acquires singularities wherein it becomes possible to understand it in its totality as a producer of collective memory; issues already addressed by Leroi-Gourhan (1983), or even by assigning value to that object, or to its use. Appadurai (2008: 15), argues that “[...] the value is never an inherent property of objects, but it is a judgement made about them by subjects”. That “judgement” represents the everyday life materialization of human actions. This “materialization” happens so spontaneously that it becomes the foundation memory of the group to which it belongs and it can only be recovered through the analyses of the dimensions related to the formation of the social fabric of that group.

3 HOSPITALITY: INTERPRETIVE POSSIBILITIES

By observing the characterization of an object in the contemporary world and the shifting of function from its original use, it becomes possible to understand which aspects of the current perception of hospitality started from the identification of the “self” in the image of the “other”. In that relationship what happens next may be thought of as “dimensions” of a process, which can be used to understand the quotidian world. In this regard, it is possible to resort to history approach, regarded as a “continuum process”, as a methodology of analysis appropriate to understand hospitality as a current model for translating the interpretive features of the contemporary world

By looking into the works of Braudel (1978), or even Le Goff and Pierre Nora (1976), the quotidian world represents the unfolding of a past not yet past. There is, in that moment, a formative heritage of the event which becomes an amalgamation of facts which build a new quotidian. Mauss describes this situation in “The Gift”, referring to societies with little technology, unaffected by today’s standardized and measurable models; however, the way hospitality manifests in our societies can be characterized and extended in multiple dimensions of that seminal process of creation of the social fabric.

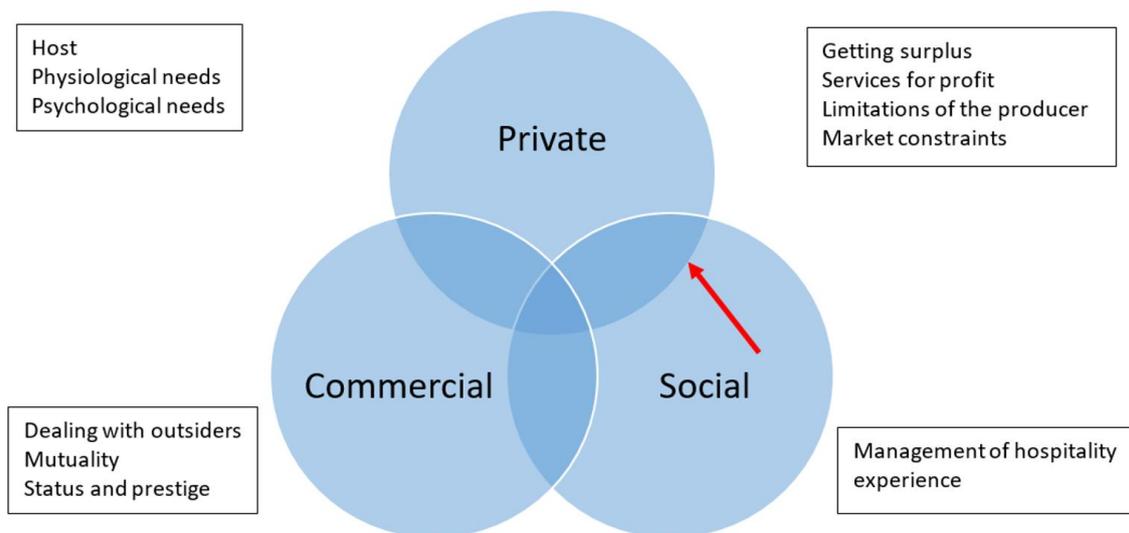
By classifying hospitality as “commercial”, “public”, or “private”, the possible and necessary interpretations become limited: hospitality is not a measurable or tangible “thing”. It represents certain actions in which a given point of view may be object of analysis and, thus, thoroughly decomposed and found in the dimensions apt for its interpretation. Godelier (2001: 23) reminds that “[...] the western culture values unsolicited gifts”, i.e. those which in a certain moment, opposed to the initial moment of the perception of the gift, become measurable and, thus, become more representative than others”.

Camargo (2004) refers the categories: “entertain, host, feed, and accommodate”. In this sense, the visualization of these models in the contemporary western society translates

into tangible, measurable values when we look for mechanisms to perpetuate capital within hospitality. The object and its characterization becomes a “value” as discussed before.

Such perspective is explored by a current of thought in Hospitality whose most renowned author is Conrad Lashley. In his analysis, Lashley (2004) states that the intersection of private, commercial and social spheres may be identified as the “management zone of the hospitality experience” (Lashley, 2004: 06).

Figure 2 – Hospitality-related activities



Source: Lashley (In: Lashley, C. Morrison, A. (Orgs.). (2004: 06.)

The original English publication was used for the insertion of the highlighted arrow. It indicates the place in which the authors try to demonstrate the idea of materialization of the “dimensions” of hospitality. For its analysis this study used the Portuguese translated version, in 2004.

In Figure 2 the author demonstrates the perception of something tangible and classifiable, indispensable for the contemporary businesses. The subtitle of his book, in the Portuguese version, “perspectives for a globalized world” already outlines the author’s theoretical directions. The objects and their values are represented in the analysis, although there are created in the external areas from those suggested in Lashley’s (2004) interpretive analysis

The current globalized world is not the same as Mauss’s, who have just experienced it at its beginning. In today’s world his essay “The Gift” becomes examined in different situations from its initial understanding.

In historiography the concept of “cultural reality” is the guiding principle for understanding the actions of the historical moment. In the contemporary western world, in which human relations are largely motivated by the needs of the state and market, the hospitality could not be an external and conflicting product with these relationships, on the contrary, it exists in multiple dimensions in the new sociocultural spaces that form. It becomes a kind of

amalgam of these relationships in their various dimensions, commercial, political, social, virtual, etc.

Le Goff and Nora (1976) call this sociocultural context “the sense of permanence” or “continuum” wherein the continuity of the process may, and in many cases that is clear, turn into something completely different from what firstly motivated it.

Its formative essence remains the same, but its original character is not immediately identifiable. Mauss had already envisaged this, and in “The Gift” he rescued that initial moment, when man identified himself with the concept of culture, “archaic societies” in his words; according to Martins’s (2005: 47) interpretation Mauss proposes that “symbolism is fundamental to social life”.

That symbolism can also be found in Le Goff and Nora’s (1976) interpretive actions, to whom history is not just a dated document. It unfolds beyond the standardized and technical object, to its assigned social function. Its “cost” is based on its context of “acceptance” by the market, but that “acceptance” can only be visualized if its symbolism is perceptible as a part of the society which gave rise to it. Therefore, the dimension of hospitality is in the perception of how this object reflects the relationships of power and how these perpetuate within mass market.

Another aspect of the contemporary understanding of the hospitality dimensions lies on the notion of value assigned to the space of everyday life. In the urban environment, for example, the relationship is made of this symbolism and, thus, the space monetarily built becomes the best place for associative expressions in which mass consumption guarantees the social continuity, not only wanted, but also controlled.

The permanence of a flow of constant consumption can be observed in the fabulous management strategies and particularly the ability of constituted powers to ensure the access to what is massive and standardized. Which managerial strategy had never wanted to bring at least one of their products for each of the citizens of this globalized world? This notion of the creation of the “essential product for life” is the transformation of the initial identification of the “self” in the “other”, in the primal sense of the collective existence of man - that can be perceived as the initial moment of perception of hospitality – in the dimensions of measurement, classification, commodification, control and thus of the continuity of the social fabric.

Mauss as a historical subject is regarded as a critic of a previous model, subordinated only to the notions of state and market, when he suggested that something which formatted the initial identity of a group remains alive in the sphere that constitutes the quotidian of that society.

Among recent research studying society from the object’s perspective, the work by Arjun Appadurai, “The social life of things” (2008), stands out. The author writes that “(...) commodities and things in general, are of independent interest to several kinds of anthropol-

ogy (Appadurai, 2008: 17). In this sense, the associative aspects of consumption and production assign to “things”, a sort of personality which can be consumed, inasmuch as it represents the expression of the needed standardization to exert control and represent the power of the administrative elite.

As for this paper, the “dimensions” that materialize and commodify aspects of hospitality are those which initially shaped the group life. They represent elements which provoke constant tension since they legitimate the existence of the other and, thus, become “comparative mirrors”. The returned image, in that sort of mirror, is the social goal to be achieved.

The archaic elements which have shaped the existence of man in group, represent what Malinowski (1975) called “Cultural Fossils”, i.e. they existed, mas their trace in present society are distant from their origin. It is Malinowski who reminds that searching for the essence of a social group by simply interpreting the function of an object is to forget that the formation of culture within a certain social group arises from multiple and infinite constituent variables, in which the environment may influence and, at the same time, being influenced, in an endless process.

3.1 History and the narrative of Hospitality

Jörn Rüsen (2001: 160-161), argues that:

Historical sense-generation requires three conditions: formally, the structure of a history; materially, the experience of past; functionally, the orientation in practical human life through representations of the passing of time

The “orientation in practical human life” refers to the understanding of tangible and intangible cultural structures. Rüsen (2001) examines the idea of the “passage of time”, noting that the models for interpreting time are not originally standardized, but created according to the needs of a specific social group. Rüsen recalls the so-called “narrativism” that tries to insert different societies in standardized, and thus controllable, models.

The dimensions unfolding from Hospitality, in the globalized world, relate to similar patterns of behaviour. They represent the transformation of something originally intangible and not measurable, part of the foundation needs of a single group, to something which can be standardized and measured.

The initial conditions of hospitality, searched and interpreted in “The Gift”, can be summarized in the guiding question posited by Mauss: “What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?” (Mauss, 2003: 188). In this expression, the meaning “obligation of exchange” assigned to the “object” epitomizes a broad array of symbolism used to justify and guide the society wherein it happens. Mauss refers to the concept of his uncle Durkheim when he posits the existence of the “total social fact”, in which the sense of group is observed in the perception, use, and permanence of the “things given”.

Thus, hospitality cannot be determined in the space time of a chronology. Hospitality was a foundational element for the various human groups, something which did not spread by dispersion, but established within the intrinsic characteristics of the existence of each social group. When searching for interpretations for hospitality we must remember that: “(...) the hospitality looks into the interpersonal relationship as a rescue (...)” (Camargo, 2015: 45).

As an example of that fact, Câmara Cascudo, without citing Mauss’s work, recalls the legend of the appearance of cassava between the Parecis, an indigenous people from the then state of Mato Grosso. Such legend relates the existence of the group to the sacrifice of one of its members who turned into cassava to feed all. As the sacrifice was made by a woman, in the future only women could harvest the cassava (Cascudo, 1988: 464). This is an example of retribution of the “thing given”. Hospitality lies in the establishment of some kind of link in the continuity and permanence of the group.

There is not a timeline, a date, because history is a legend, something lost in time and thus “narrativism” is not possible, as argued Rüser. Trying to date and classify hospitality, we make the mistake of historical anachronism, in which the current narrative tries to fit in a different cultural setting. By doing so, it becomes possible to measure and classify, and thus transform the intangible into something tangible, quantified and commodified.

Such actions enable the understanding of how the thesis of “The Gift” was incorporated into the so-called “business world”. The endless necessity of exchange, that would ensure the existence of a group, can only continue to exist in the globalized world if the patterns of that existence are tangible and measurable for all cultural groups. The hospitality domains analyzed by Lashley (2004) represent the pursuit of these patterns. Through standardization the reality is reflected in what can be used as an instrument of the consolidated power.

The quantification established by current use of the notions of hospitality, refers to a rescue of situations that have equated the everyday life of human groups: receive, host, entertain, and feed (Camargo, 2004). These situations become measurable interpretative bases for contemporary hospitality management.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper aims to understand Mauss as a “historical subject”; based on his works and also examining the social thought of the period it is possible to understand the ideas in the book “The Gift” in the context of Mauss’s moment as an ethnographer and anthropologist. Trying to translate his ideas into the contemporary world it became necessary to envisage and analyze them through the lenses of historical interpretation.

Documentary methods enables the recovering of a moment lived by a subject. In the absence of living witnesses of that intellectual environment that led to the essay “The Gift”, the use of bibliographic references, produced in that time, and about that time, are a significant help to understand Mauss’s epoch.

The moment wherein he produced his work is not equal to the contemporary world, in which his theory can be applied in order to further understand Hospitality as a mechanism for understanding the world today. The reasoning of the "archaic societies" are transmuted into actions and movements that have appropriate dimensions to their interpretation through hospitality. The technique, which was before an element of the false notion of the degree of evolution of the culture of human groups, used to justify the domination of other groups, is today an element of measurement and characterization, focused on economic and consumption appeal.

The actuality of "The Gift" lies on the understanding that it is an interpretive proposal for the formation of the idea of culture in human groups. By doing so, the risk of interpret it in a diachronic view of history is minimized, i.e. a sequence of disconnected events. The Hospitality, as main result of the interpretation proposed by Mauss in his essay, presents itself in the symbolism of the actions and representations of things, that same "thing given" that must be reciprocated.

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