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## Comment on Richard Swedberg/2

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*by* Daniel Miller

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I find I am in the position as a commenter, less of engaging with what is in this paper, than in having to make reference to what isn't. I supposed it says something about the separation of disciplines and the sheer scale of contemporary academia, that the author can write an entire paper on economy as the material culture of household management in blissful unawareness of the degree to which such a subject already exists in the form of material culture studies and within more general anthropology.

To start with the wider context of materiality and economy as addressed in the opening paragraphs. Within anthropology there has been decades of studies of the material culture of economies. Indeed anthropological economics as developed within the small scale societies centred on issues such as the gift, in which it was the objects that were central to the constitution of social relations. Less well known is the way material culture studies has increasingly also on money, markets and finance. For example a recent volume on materiality which I edited, included papers by Maurer [2005] on the materiality of money in relation to Islam and by Miyazaki [2005] on Japanese arbitrage traders. Along with this goes an infrastructure concerned with the basic theorising of materiality, material culture, objectification and the place of objects in society. These at the very least parallels the contribution of Latour and the studies that are discussed within this paper. They are also much indebted to older French anthropological writing such as the work of Bourdieu. In addition there are many anthropologists who would not identify directly with material culture studies that in practice deal with similar issues around the materiality of economies, such as Hart [2000] on money and Zaloom [2003] on finance.

The main part of Swedberg's paper is much more specific, being concerned with that materiality expressed in the organisation of household economy. Yet once again there are quite precise parallels. In particular any reader of this paper should also be made aware of the work of Gudeman [Gudeman and Rivera 1990]. In his book *Conversations in Colombia* he also addressed the way the household economy was conceptualised and discussed by classical authors such as Aristotle and Xenophon, where the moral economy of the household is the microcosm that defines economy itself. In his case he argues that this classical tradition comes very close to the basic sensibility of many peasant societies, with often equally profound consequences. Though that profundity arises through the analysis of practice rather than in philosophical debate itself. I do not wish to detract from the merits of that dissection as carried out here by Swedberg, rather I want to complement the analysis. All sort of consequences discussed here, such as the way gender relations are produced through this conceptualisation of the household economy are much elaborated in this wider literature. It is also certainly worth comparing the way Gudeman considers the trajectory from Aristotle through to Adam Smith in terms of household management.

Where the anthropological discussion of these topics goes perhaps rather further than Swedberg is in its examination of the linkage between a concern with household management as constituting economy and the issues of symbolic nature of the house itself. This is because in so many traditions the primary economic concern is with the maintenance of the house and the goal of life is to bequeath this at least intact or ideally augmented by successful economic activity to the next generation. Which is why these issues become bound up with the more general concerns with the house as lineage [e.g. Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995], or its role in the formation of kinship [Carsten 2004, chapter two]. Again Gudeman is a particular good example of this concern with the house within peasant societies.

Whether Marx represents such a detachment from materiality as suggested by this paper is a moot point. While Marx raises his sights to the global political economy rather than the household, the whole structure rests on his materialised version of Hegelian concepts of objectification. A useful rejoinder to Swedberg, in terms of Marx's concern with everyday objects of consumption would be Stallybrass's [1998] excellent paper *Marx's Coat*. I have much less of a problem when reading the section of contemporary economics and I think this abstract from materiality would be widely accepted as one of the main problems social science has with the trajectory of economics itself. Though interestingly in politics there has been the occasional return to this older tradition. Margaret Thatcher could not have succeeded in her economic revolution in the UK if she had not managed in a quite extraordinary fashion to simultaneously embrace Milton Friedman and yet somehow convey this to

the voters in the language of an ordinary housewife trying to manage her domestic economy.

Overall I could not be more enthusiastic in support of a call to bring back the consideration of material culture in general and house management in particular into the way social science provides an alternative to mainstream economics in both conceptualisation and representation what we might call actual economic practice as opposed to mere economic modelling. But for anyone interested in this task I would hope they would also acquaint themselves with the entire sub-discipline of material culture studies and the wider context of anthropological work that for decades has ploughed this same furrow.

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## Comment on Richard Swedberg/2

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Abstract: This comment is intended to complement the contribution of Swedberg by pointing out the considerable amount of research conducted in this area by material culture studies. Both with respect to economic processes more generally and household economies more specifically. Parallels are drawn between the contribution of Swedberg and the work of Gudeman.

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*Keywords: material culture, anthropology, objectification, household, materiality.*

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