

## **Thinking (with) museums: From exhibitionary complex to governmental assemblage**

**Tony Bennett**

One of the more distinctive aspects of contemporary intellectual engagements with museums in the wake of the 'new museology' has been their close connection to more general concerns located at the conjunctions of social and cultural theory. Museums have, on the one hand, proved to be 'good to think with' in the sense of providing useful sites for exploring such conjunctions. I shall illustrate these concerns by considering the differences between two theoretical frameworks that I have proposed for engaging with such questions: first, one which interprets museums as parts of an 'exhibitionary complex' and, second, their interpretation as parts of governmental assemblages. While these are both, broadly speaking, derived from the work of Foucault, they have different consequences. My purpose will be to identify these differences by reviewing the two concepts and identifying the different kinds of work they make possible. I shall begin with the concept of the exhibitionary complex which, while it has proved quite influential since I first proposed it in the 1980s, has also had its critics. I shall review these criticisms – including ones I have made in subsequent work – and indicate what I think still worth retaining from this earlier proposal. I shall then go on to review what I mean by, in a more recent suggestion, referring to museums as 'governmental assemblages' and what is to be gained by bringing together assemblage theory and Foucauldian governmentality theory to think museums, and to think with them.