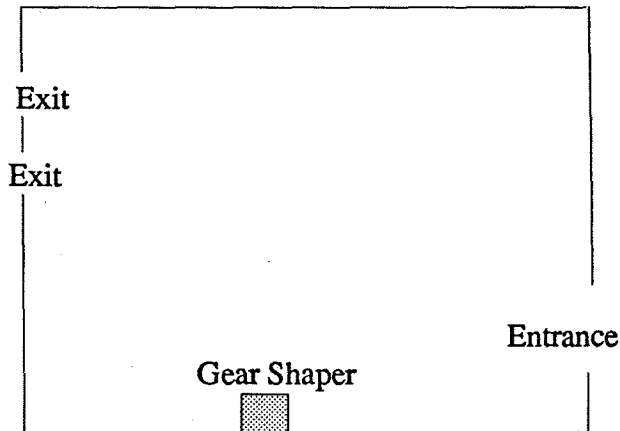


The Role of Movement in Exhibition

From Arthur W. Melton (1936). *Distribution of Attention in Galleries in a Museum of Science and Industry*. *Museum News*, 14(3), 6-8. Also reported in Melton (1972). *Visitor Behavior in Museums: Some Early Research in Environmental Design*. *Human Factors*, 14(5), 96-106.

Melton's study on the role of movement in attracting visitors is available from two sources: *Museum News* and *Human Factors*. The study was worth repeating and hopefully is available to readers from one of these sources. I strongly recommend reading the entire study carefully. The study is important because it shows that moving elements of an exhibit must be carefully designed. While any kind of movement attracts visitors, the overall consequences of this movement on the exhibit may not be positive.



The object of study was a gear-shaper, a massive piece of machinery, located in the machine tool section of the New York Museum of Science and Industry. The gear shaper was located on the left wall as the visitor entered (see diagram of gallery).

Prior to the study the gear-shaper received little attention, while the panels of moving mechanisms at the center of the gallery received a great deal of attention. The average time spent at the gear-shaper was 22.6 seconds. However, when the gear-shaper was operating for one or two minutes followed by a rest period, the average viewing time increased to between 51 and 75 seconds depending on the run and rest times used. In addition, the number of people who stopped increased from 1.5% to a range of 27.6 to 38.6%, again, depending on the run and rest times. In addition, the time spent by visitors in the entire gallery increased from an average of 258 to 278 seconds. Exhibits on either side of the gear-shaper benefited from the increased attention to the moving exhibit. However, exhibits on the other side of the gallery were detrimentally affected: visitors were less likely to view exhibits to the right of the entrance.

To understand the entire effects of the gear-shaper movement on all gallery exhibits, one must consider more than time looking at exhibits and/or percentage of stopping. Melton pointed out that the gear-shaper movement changed the circulation path of visitors. Originally, visitors turned right when entering the gallery. Movement from the gear-shaper, however, drew their attention and resulted in visitors travelling straight ahead toward the source of movement instead of turning right. It is not difficult to see that such an effect has negative consequences to exhibits to the right of the entrance. If these exhibits were considered of critical importance, the overall result could be considered undesirable.

Visitor Behavior
P. O. Box 3090
Jacksonville State University
Jacksonville, AL 36265

NON PROF. ORG.
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
JACKSONVILLE, AL
BULK-RATE
PERMIT NO. 2