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“I like my Horse, but I Loove my Flying Mount!”

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## Joys of Mobility in the On-line game *World of Warcraft* “I like my Horse, but I Love my Flying Mount!”

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### ABSTRACT

It is today commonplace that games and virtual worlds are not only multi-billion-dollar businesses but also momentous socio-cultural phenomena that require critical attention. Massively Multiplayer On-line Games (MMOGs) are these days becoming recognized not only as grounds for play within ‘magic circles’ but also as complex and significant social spaces with 24-7 access to the millions of gamers who inhabit them. If the idea of MMOGs as closed off playgrounds is rejected, such games and their gamers, engaging in social and virtual geographies, may be viewed as transport systems and users whose socio-cultural constructions of mobility can be studied to identify barriers to, and alternative strategies for, more sustainable mobility solutions.<sup>1</sup> Game design thus becomes a potential arena for crafting and providing alternative models of mobility.

This paper focuses on mobility in the world’s number one on-line role-playing game, *World of Warcraft* (2004) as experienced by a number of players and as expressed in the Swedish fan-magazine *Level*, writing only on *World of Warcraft* for many years, particularly in one of their articles on in-game mounts (*Level* 2007). Players produce as much as consume play, here read: mobility, but the game (mechanics) does control player movement in crucial ways. This paper seeks to show how traditionally positive values of mobility are employed by gamers and in the game design to enhance, inspire and prolong gameplay. Mobility is understood as central to the game experience, its playability, marketing and resulting commercial success. Although there is, at least on the surface, a democratization of mobility in operation e.g., in terms of safe and equal – gender and race-neutral access and public transportation options, the dominant configuration and use of mobility speaks of a very traditional mobility view with limited innovative mobility visions leaving much to be desired in view of the seemingly endless possibilities that game design and simulation might offer.

**Keywords:** mobility, games, play, space, travel, virtual worlds, mobility practices, gamer, player, gender, simulation, virtual geography, MMOS, MMOG, World of Warcraft

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a pilot study for a project in progress, pending funding: *Cultural Representations of Sustainable Mobility: A Virtual Ethnographic Study of Traveling and Transport Views and Practices in Computer Games and On-line Worlds, (CURVES)*.

If focusing on mobility and transportation in video games seems an odd venture, then consider the articles on *BBCNews* reporting that a study<sup>2</sup> of a driving school declared that “Games make drivers go faster”, and “racing games breed bad drivers” (BBC News, 2007 March 2; 2007 March 19) or the statement by a transport spokesman in New Zealand who blames Playstations and X-boxes for teen road deaths (*New Zealand Herald*, 2006, Dec 25). The discussion on the influence of games, and (new) media in general (Livingstone 2002; Silverstone 2007), on particularly young people’s behavior is not new, but the focus has perhaps been on violence rather than traffic manners. This paper, by focusing on virtual mobility, specifically in MMOGs (see below) indirectly addresses real world traffic and transportation issues by way of their inclusion in the much wider category and interdisciplinary discourse of “mobility”<sup>3</sup> which, in the view espoused here, encompasses online/virtual as well as offline/physical contexts.

### **What are MMOGs and why study them?**

As the topic of games and mobility is brought to the fore, racing games or mobile games played on phones or PDAs (see Aarseth 2003, Suominen & Parikka 2006), ubiquitous gaming, Alternate Reality Games-ARGs (e.g., McGonigal 2003) or augmented reality (AR) game experiences/dramas etc. (e.g., Dow et al 2006), which though very interesting in themselves are different topics that deserve a different paper. None of these will be discussed here; neither will videogames played on consoles (offline) or handheld games (e.g., Nintendo

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<sup>2</sup> “Virtual driving and risk taking: Do racing games increase risk-taking cognitions, affect, and behaviors? (Fischer et al 2007)

<sup>3</sup> See for example John Urry (2000).

DS, PSP). Instead, this paper centers on the world's currently most popular PC game, *World of Warcraft* (2004), hereafter called *WoW*, which is a so called MMOG or MMORPG, a *Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game* (hereafter: MMOG).

The MMOG is increasingly becoming recognized both as a successful cultural genre and social medium. MMOGs developed out of the so-called MUDS and MOOs of the late 1970s and have gradually grown both more technically and graphically advanced: from merely text to text and graphics, from black and white to multicolor, and from 2D to 3D. They have also become widely popular; the major breakthrough often dated to 1992 as *Ultima* was launched. *Ultima Online* (1992), *Asheron's Call* (1999), *EverQuest* (1999) *Anarchy Online* (2001) and *World of Warcraft* (2004), are all MMOGs that have made their imprint on a market whose turnover now supersedes that of the Hollywood film industry.

The expansion of the internet has played a vital part in the development and spreading of MMOGs. As internet-access became more generally available for larger populations, game companies could on the one hand, sell their games over the internet; on the other they faced the same problems as the music industry: pirate copying, peer-to-peer file sharing of programs, as well as cracked games and keys etc. Monthly subscriptions and mandatory downloads, from patches to larger chunks of code to make games fully operable, became important strategies for game companies to safeguard their copyright and keep making money on their products. Continuous updating and patching not only service the players and improve the game but is a neat way of keeping subscribers tied to the game they have

purchased. Keeping the often fastidious, fickle, and game-migrating game-consumer connected to a particular MMOG, open 24-7, is a key to commercial success.

Around the turn of the year, the maker of *WoW*, Blizzard, announced that *World of Warcraft* had passed the 10-million mark of “active subscribers worldwide: 2.5+ million in North America, 2+ million in Europe, and approximately 5.5 million in Asia” (Woodcock 2008).

Woodcock predicts, based on previous MMOGs popularity curves that the interest should “peak out around the 12 million – mark, but adds that “so far, *WoW* has broken all the rules and consistently exceeded all expectations” (Woodcock 2008). The computer-game industry is thus the fastest growing in the world with *WoW* as its spearhead MMOG. In the affluent world, game media is entering not only kids’ entertainment zone, but everyman’s living room; in Sweden, a country of approximately 9 million inhabitants, 7.6 million computer games were sold last year (Dataspelsbranschen, [The Swedish Games Industry] 2007; see figure 1.) to a value of 2.3 billion SEK. *WoW* was the most popular game in several categories, next to *Singstar Karaoke* (a Playstation2-game).



Fig. 1. The top-twenty games sales in Sweden 2007.

Approximately half of the Swedish population plays computer games, and the gender distribution, according to the Swedish Games industry chairman Öjje Holt, is 50% female and 50 % male players (Wilczek 2008), a number which considerably challenges the traditional view of computer games being played merely by teenage boys.

Whether it is *WoW* or another MMOG, its players and researchers have come to realize that these games are "vibrant sites of culture" (Taylor 2006) and not only grounds for play within "magic circles", as Johan Huizinga (1955) once conceptualized them. In their capacity as "persistent worlds," which continue "to exist and develop internally even when there are no people interacting with it" (Bartle 2004), they are complex and significant social spaces with round the clock access to the millions of gamers who inhabit them (see e.g., Taylor 2006; Yee 2006). If the idea of MMOGs as closed off playgrounds<sup>4</sup> is rejected, MMOGs and their gamers, engaging in social and virtual geographies, may be viewed as transport systems and as users whose socio-cultural constructions of mobility can be studied to identify barriers to, and alternative strategies for, more sustainable mobility solutions, in everyday socio-cultural contexts and life off-line.<sup>5</sup> Game design here becomes a potential arena for crafting and providing alternative models of mobility.

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<sup>4</sup> Many scholars have now firmly rejected the concept of the magic circle showing the fuzzy borders existing between work and play and other activities (Taylor 2006). Hector Rodriguez who in his 2006 article, discusses the usefulness of the concept, as understood by Caillois (1961) and Huizinga (1955), for designing serious games and Rodriguez also refers to Marcus Montola (2005) who describes at least three ways of deconstructing the concept in the context of pervasive gaming.

<sup>5</sup> This paper is a wedge of my study *Cultural Representations of Sustainable Mobility: A Virtual Ethnographic Study of Traveling and Transport Views and Practices in Computer Games and On-line Worlds*, (CURVES).

Mobility goes hand in hand with space – whether geographical or social. Games are “eminently spatial” (Aarseth 1999) in their construction. MMOGs may perhaps be perceived even more so than less graphically detailed, more abstract games, or less mimetic in the sense of representing by imitating something in the world. Their feature of (human-like) avatars to stand in for the human player in charge of the controls also makes it easier to see the need for movement of some kind of “body” or “subject” in the simulated world of the game, which in the case of *World of Warcraft* is called Azeroth.

### **Meanings of Mobility**

Above all, the conception of mobility underpinning this study emphasizes the political ramifications of movement and mobility. Mobility is not an “innocent” activity or *just* a transfer of mass in space: it is heavily gendered (Enevold 2003, Polk 1998) and a matter of social positioning (Massey, 1994). Historically, *voluntary* mobility is associated with social and economic progress, thus it is a value-laden discourse which is evident in an everyday language of mobility (Enevold 2002) as well as in contemporary theoretical discourses (Wolff 1993; Veijola and Jokinen 1994). This tradition is deeply entrenched in expressions like a “fast” woman = a promiscuous woman, “trafficking” = selling women’s bodies, and “wayward women” = wanton females (Enevold 2002, 2004). Obviously, women’s mobility is consistently linked to sexuality, and traditionally, women’s sexuality is associated with immorality that should be contained. Mobility can also carry negative social and racial connotations including male subjects in the categories of vagrants and gypsies. However, as I have shown elsewhere (Enevold 2003, 2004), mobility associated with women has been placed even

lower and been socially more abhorred. A majority of contemporary narratives as well as phenomena such as who owns drives or repairs cars engage a masculinist paradigm of automobility. Cars, driving, traveling and mobility are generally associated with positive masculinity (cf. Scharff 1991, 2003; Polk 1998, Veijola and Jokinen 1994). Mobility (and travel) abides by a “masculine logic” (Smith 2001); masculinity is a *positive* trait associated with strength, speed, vitality, mobility, and power. Simply put, man’s generally positive attitude to masculine mobility is a barrier to sustainable development. Or even more bluntly, men’s: transport research has shown that women use more public transport and drive safer, while more men use individual transport and die in traffic accidents (Polk 1998). The positive associations of mobility and individual freedom and power underlie motorists’ general deep-seated resistance to reducing individual car use, even though there is rising awareness that a reduction would decrease the use of fossil fuels and greenhouse-gas emissions. Transport ideologies and mobility views make people choose individual freedom at environmental costs; together with the socio-cultural (gendered) roles these views inform actual mobility behavior.

### **Mobility and Games**

Games, of all types and genres can be said to involve, even require, its players to carry out a range of ‘performances’ of mobility. These include but are not restricted to traversing the game space, executing avatar movements in the event that they exist - so called emoting – and physically moving the controls (hitting keys, using a mouse or track pad, or in the case of console games one or more handheld devices). The third category is based on the argument that gaming is an embodied experience, much contrary to the perception of gaming as merely



a mental activity (cf Dovey and Kennedy 2006; Lahti 2003, Taylor 2003). Persistent worlds can also be perceived as a type of service always at the player's disposal, possible to visit around the clock (Zackariasson and Wilson 2004); a kind of virtual travel sight. Clearly gameplay can also be seen as "virtual tourism: a leisure-oriented substitute movement through a virtual space especially constructed to accommodate that movement" (Enevold and Aarseth, forthcoming). As stated above, mobility and travel come loaded with meaning. Games, as other media, contribute to disseminations of values and attitudes – whether these be conservative, traditional views or innovative and visionary alternatives. Insofar as we believe they matter; we may want to ask what mobility views *WoW* represents? What limits does the game impose; what opportunities for movement does it present? Does role-playing or performing tasks in this virtual world merely mimic the joys and woes of mobility of the real world or invite innovative strategies? How do players experience and practice mobility and what mobility view do the game offer?

### **Mobility and Mounts**

It is of course impossible to answer all of the above questions within the limited framework of a short paper. The panel<sup>6</sup> for which this paper was written focused on the pleasures rather than the downsides of mobility, tourism etc. As panel organizer Timo Myllyntaus' proposal phrased it; we will focus on "the nice experiences" and particularly "one of the prominent pleasures of motoring" namely "driving a car" (personal communication). As I for the past year have been conducting my research, interviewing players and examining media treating

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<sup>6</sup> <https://esshc.socialhistory.org/conference/programme/2008?day=27&time=89&session=1625&textsearch=Enevold>

various aspects of *WoW* and mobility, the pleasurable experiences and positive constructions of mobility have stood out and more or less begged to be reported, and, I should hasten to add, critiqued. Hence, the necessary reduction in scope corresponds very well to some essential features of mobility and *WoW* and does not diminish as much as condense some very significant conclusions that can be drawn about ‘*WoW*-mobility’.

Naturally, in a fantasy-inspired world like *WoW*, the main means of transportation are not cars; they are animal mounts. However, cars do figure on the sidelines among engineer goblins and gnomes who compete in building and racing the fastest vehicle in the zone of Azeroth called the Shimmering Flats.<sup>7</sup> Players whose characters have reached the maximum skill level in engineering can also manufacture their own helicopter, the “turbo-charged flying machine control” (see figure 2). But, other than that, avatar-controlled vehicles are mainly mounts of various kinds, and once a character hits level 40 (max is 70) the mount serves the character in much the same way a private car would. Here, I have accordingly concentrated on the joys of mobility paying particular attention to these various mounts and, to continue the discussion of car marketing in a historical perspective initiated for this panel by Olle Hagman Göteborg University and Christopher Neumaier (who presented with Killian Steiner, both from Potsdam)<sup>8</sup>, I have chosen to examine their “advertising” in the most recent issue (3/2007) of the fan magazine “Level presents World of Warcraft.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> (<http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/gadgetzan/gt001/speedracer.html>). These are so called NPCs and their competition belongs to their “backstory”, which is supplied by Blizzard.

<sup>8</sup> <https://esshc.socialhistory.org/conference/programme/2008?textsearch=Neumaier>

<sup>9</sup> Reset Media

## Player constructions of mobility 1: Grand Theft Kodo

One night my character, a level 70 of the Tauren race runs into a level 38 Bloodelf walking across the outer courtyard of Undercity, the capital of the Undead. I have my interface set up to show me the character and guild name of those I encounter, and over this particular female hovers the conspicuous and amusing guild name “Grand Theft Kodo”, an obvious paraphrase of the infamous game title “Grand Theft Auto”. I strike up a conversation with Keeir who, after I (I) have introduced myself as a games and mobility researcher, agrees to be interviewed.

### Interview w Keeir, level 38 Blood Elf. (Fem, 20, England) 1/27 23:00 - 1/27 23:20.

*I: You a big guild?*

*Keeir: Actually no - there's just a few of us, but we do get around :p*

*Around 10 guild members - just friends mainly. [from] England and Wales*

*I: Why did you pick the name? :)*

*Keeir: Because our GM has a Speedy Kodo and it looked so amusing that we wanted to work it in there somehow*

*I: how do you usually travel around? here in Azeroth*

*Keeir: On feet \*points to blistered feet\**

*Keeir: I've not hit 40 yet, so I can't get a mount*

*I: poor you... only 2 more levels though*

*Keeir: Aye - other than that, bat or wind-rider when possible*

*I: the mount.. is that a big goal?*

*Keeir: As a rogue I have 'Sprint' too*

*I: true true*

*Keeir: Well, the people who I live with have just hit lvl 40, so there's an incentive to reach it soon so that I don't get left behind when we quest together*

*I: You have any other higher chars?*

*Keeir: Yeah, another rogue who i brought across from The Sha'tar*

*I: so you know what it feels like to have a mount then.*

*Keeir: Yeah*



*I: if you were to say 3 things about mounts what would it be?*  
*Keir: Erm....I'd say, they make the game a little less tedious - there's nothing worse when you're questing to have to keep running back and forth between the same places*  
*I: ok so less tedious.*  
*Keir: Secondly, they come in a variety of sorts - so you needn't get your race-specific one - which is cool*  
*I: agreed*  
*Keir: Variety is the spice of life and all that...*  
*I: yup yup*  
*Keir: Plus working up the rep makes for a change to normal questing*  
*I: ah the rep for getting a different mount you mean?*  
*Keir: Yeah, Like Darkspear rep for getting a raptor etc*  
*I: what about the traveling itself..the moving.. how does that feel? Is it just necessary? Or is there any fun to be had in it?*  
*Keir: I don't know about necessary...: Given that I have 'sprint' - I'm used to the speed of it*  
*I: and that is an ability that you like?*  
*Keir: Well yes*  
*I: being without a mount is that an option?*  
*Keir whispers: As for fun - its cool to be on an animal - but there's no more fun in the actual travelling aspect than there is to jumping as you run*  
*I: ah, ok i see*  
*Keir whispers: Occasionally I jump over things as I run to make the running less tedious - same with a mount*  
*Keir whispers: But being without a mount isn't really an option when I hit 40 because I have the money to pay for a riding skill and it'll be so much easier*  
*I: well, when you get the mount - will you let me know how it feels? MAYbe if it changes anything in particular?*  
*Keir whispers: Of course*  
*I say: Thank you fair bloodelf.*  
*You bow before Keir.*  
*Keir salutes you with respect.*  
*You wave at Keir.*  
*Keir waves goodbye to you. Farewell!*

Apart from a few unimportant words removed to improve readability, the interview above is excerpted in its entirety. I use an addon called chat logger that comes with the game that can be toggled on and off to record our exchange. When I ask to take a picture, she says, sure, just let me put my role-playing gear on. That means she dresses in other clothes to suit the personality and appearance she has picked for her avatar. Appearance plays a big part in

role-playing<sup>10</sup>. As the server we are playing on is a role-playing server, the chance to encounter players who actually act a role is greater than on so called Player versus Environment servers. The role-playing is not very hard-core though, so players tend to slide in and out of character (abbreviated IC/OOC) depending which chat channel they are using.

From her account we learn that mobility is crucial for crushing the tediousness of repetitive tasks, shortening transportation time, upholding group activities, motivating so called grinding – earning points to level up. Speed is vital – as a rogue she has innate sprint ability, so she knows how it feels to advance faster than the usual running. When you first come to *WoW* your character runs by default; but you can make it walk, which is a feature often used by role-players. The speed of the “epic kodo” has also been worked into the guild name, and the speed generated by a mount is important not to get behind. The grinding for reputation that she speaks of means that if you carry out certain tasks for certain factions in the game you can as a reward get or buy a particular mount. Each race has its specific mount but, with some exceptions, can earn reputation with other races to purchase one of their mounts. With a mount everything will be “so much easier”.

The game thus rewards long hours of repetitive tasks with mobility enhancements in the shape of mounts, and the fact that they cannot be ridden until level 40 and the epic, an even faster mount, cannot be obtained until level 60 serve as incentives for leveling. Finally, at level 70, there is a flying mount to be had, and for a big sum of gold an epic flying mount can be

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the interrelation between avatar appearance and capacity and player identification, see Tronstad 2008.

purchased that further increases speed and accessibility. Some areas cannot be reached unless you have a flying mount – in that regard the game consequently spurs on leveling and, beyond that, makes it necessary to earn the gold to purchase better faster mounts. Having acquired an epic flying mount myself, with the help of generous *guildies*, making money selling harvested minerals or herbs is a lot faster and easier and completely alters gameplay – space is more easily overcome, group play is simplified, all areas of the game are accessible and gold-making and consequently the purchasing of better equipment for playing in harder areas is made possible and sped up, which is confirmed by each and every player that I talk to.

## **Player Constructions of Mobility 2 - Multiple Matching Mounts.**

**Interview with Male level 66 Troll. Male player, unknown age. 2/12 2008, 21:49 - 2/12 21:57**

*I meet this player when questing in the Nagrand zone. We help each other out with a couple of quests and while we travel to and from the locations they are in, he keeps changing mounts which of course raises my curiosity and I introduce myself and ask to pose a few questions. We jump in medias res of the interview.*

*I: I investigate travel in virtual worlds.*

*Spurrex: xP*

*I: i always find it fascinating when people have many mounts*

*Spurrex: Still aint got any Kodos or Hawkstriders :P*

*I: Why do you have them?*

*Spurrex: Dunno. I just get em if i feel like it*

*I: How many do you have?*

*Spurrex: Erm.*

*Spurrex: 7 i think*

*I: so just for fun?*

*] Spurrex: Not really.*

*I: tell me?*

*Spurrex: I guess i just buy em for Rp :P*

*I: so what about RP and mounts? how you use them them- im a bit curious; conversation starter?*

*Spurrex: By pressing some buttons? -.^*

*I: lol no not like that. For RP :D*

*Spurrex: I... uhh... Ride on them*

*I: but wouldnt one be enough then?*

*Spurrex: Depends on what i'm wearing :P*

Spurrex has obviously grinded<sup>11</sup> many hours for the various factions to obtain a number of mounts. Keeping a stable of style-matching vehicles might in car terms translate into taking out the red, blue or green Porsche, Volvo or BMW. The mount definitely communicates something. Spurrex was in a hurry and did not give a crystal-clear answer as to the motivation behind all his mounts, but the style element appears crucial. The fact that they are bought for “RP” confirms their status as bearers of values and messages about their owners, much like people identify with the car they buy – color, shape, speed, function and is reflected in the way they use it – everyday transportation of kids or traveling to work, boasting, joyriding etc.

### **Player Constructions of Mobility 3 – I like my horse...**

My last example was not chatlogged. In the beginning I had still not figured out all the nifty devices I could use to aid my ethnographic enterprise and was consequently just taking notes on a piece of paper. However, I took a screenshot of this level 40 male Human warrior whom I met while trying out the tram inside the mountain between Stormwind City and Ironforge. The tram is one of three public collective transportation systems in Azeroth – the Ironforge tram, the zeppelin and the boat – all free of charge. Individual public transportation systems sport bats and wyverns that for a price fly you on set routes to fixed destinations (that you have already been to). I was also hanging out outside the platform to catch travelers, but very few appeared that day. The human warrior kindly answered my questions about using the tram and pointed out that he did not usually use this means of transport; today he was delivering a quest and it was convenient to just go back and forth between the cities on the tram. He

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<sup>11</sup> I am using the form *grinded* instead of *ground* as it reflects the activity and verb *grinding* better.

subsequently produced his horse to show me his usual vehicle and responded to my comment “what a nice horse” (I was after all a level 7 gnome without any ride whatsoever so some admiration was in order) that sure he liked his horse, but he *looved* his flying mount. This love sprung mainly from the enjoyment of its speed and all that this speed entailed, as accounted for above.



### **Pimp my Mount – Media Constructions and Marketing use of Mobility**

Issue 3, 2007 of the Swedish fan magazine “Level presents *World of Warcraft*”<sup>12</sup> features an eight-page long presentation of the “most hard-to-get valuables” in the game, under the title “Pimp My Mount” – a paraphrase that might sound familiar to anyone who has watched the

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<sup>12</sup> In Swedish: Level presenterar *World of Warcraft*, pp. 52–59. All translations of titles and article content are mine.



MTV- show "Pimp My Ride" (MTV 2004-2007), which of course is a direct allusion to cars. The article contains color illustrations and comments of the mounts and descriptions of how they can be obtained. Fourteen mounts and the aforementioned turbo-charger are put on stage. The flying mounts include: the "fair feather machine", the Cenarion War Hippogryph obtainable for "rich" players exalted with Cenarion; the "extraterrestrial ray" Nether Ray, that you can work towards by performing daily quests (a maximum number per day), but only if you already have a flying mount; the "ironclad mastodon dragon" the Swift Nether Drake, that cannot be bought but is a reward for 0,5 % of those who "fight day in and day out" in PvP arenas and is "the only mount next to the Ashes Al'Ar, which has a flight speed of 310%"; the Ashes of Al'Ar is the fastest mount in the game, "410% on the ground and 310 in the air" and leaves a spectacular tail of fire behind it that make "people drop their jaws". It is a very rare drop in the instance (an in-game battle ground) called The Eye.

Ground mounts are then presented, and here we find interesting links to products associated with the game. The "spectacular" Reins of the Swift Spectral Tiger is a thing to "yearn for" and requires luck *outside* the game. The *WoW Trading Card Game*-expansion *Fires of Outland* contains "loot cards" that can be used in-game; in the Azeroth port, Booty Bay, stands a goblin on the quay who will accept the code on the card and in exchange give you a "blue transparent tiger". The connection between real and in-game mobility becomes very clear as we learn that loot cards can actually be bought on Ebay for approximately 450 dollars. The mount is suddenly assigned a value that perhaps more readily recognize as "real" – real money, which further confirms the status of mobility construed in *WoW*. The same thing goes

for the Riding Turtle, which is not fast, but attracts “attention outside the auction house”. This “extremely rare turtle is only obtainable by way of The Saltwater Snapjaw-loot card that with lots of luck can drop in the *WoW Trading Card Game*”. The turtle can also be purchased on Ebay - a “bargain” at around 100 dollars. Eight more mounts are presented, one more unique than the other: they have low drop rates, they require work, getting through instances with groups and being lucky enough to get the winning draw in case it drops; The Deathcharger Reins with a 0.01 % drop chance is allegedly known to have “sundered guilds”. In short, each mount requires effort, time, work and money and awards respectful looks, a stylish ride to boast with and show off and supposedly a sense of accomplishment and being in possession of something rare.

### **Mobility means Money**

I believe we can comfortably ascertain that the “trauma” of being “de-situated” in cyberspace, as Paul Virilio once expressed it (Virilio 1995), is more or less an obsolete conception of the experience of space, at least judging by the views and practices of mobility in the persistent world of *WoW*. Taking into consideration the trading of items and mounts for real money indicates an almost seamless flow between physical and virtual world.

The powers of mobility freeing up time and space seem to have also enchanted the inhabitants of Azeroth. The spatial lay-out of Azeroth can of course be discussed and problematized further. I refer the interested reader interested in game maps and vehicle speed to an article by Anders Løvlie (2007), and to Aarseth’s article for more on *WoW* as

spatial practice (2008) and Borries et al's on the architectural design of Azeroth's cities (2007). As Aarseth claims, the stiff Disney-like amusement park environment one finds in WoW nevertheless seems to contribute to its playability. To this I would like to add the factor of required mobility. Mobility thus works in both an inviting and a compelling way: Azeroth's geography *invites* to almost seamless travel (despite its unrealistic proportions) but also *obliges* the player to travel at increasingly quicker speeds and making the transition from ground to air in order to fulfill endgame-goals. The quests, zones, leveling requirement, in my mind, rely heavily on the player's performance of mobility. To this can be added the vitality of mobility for roleplay – not only in terms of emotes – which generally have been found rather trivial and insufficient in *WoW*- (see e.g., Bennerstedt 2008) but as apparel, and status symbols – a function which seems to extend beyond roleplay.

As I presented elsewhere (Enevold 2007) mobility views and practices are to a great extent player constructed, but game mechanics will at some point restrict player behavior, for example, by designing areas that cannot be accessed without a flying mount and withholding riding skills until certain levels which will encourage players to stay in the game working towards that highly desirable expertise. Constructing coveted awards in terms of mounts and connecting in-game mounts to extra-game accessory products, as in the case of the card game loot cards, also establish the significance of mobility for game marketing. There are more examples, but no more room to include them all in this paper.

To conclude, mobility is employed by gamers and in the game design to enhance, inspire and prolong gameplay. I understand mobility as central to the experience of the game, its playability, marketing and resulting commercial success. Although there is, at least on the surface, a democratization of mobility in operation e.g., in terms of safe and equal – gender and race-neutral access and public transportation options, the dominant configuration and use of mobility speaks of a very traditional mobility view with limited innovative mobility visions leaving much to be desired in view of the seemingly endless possibilities that game design and simulation might offer.

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