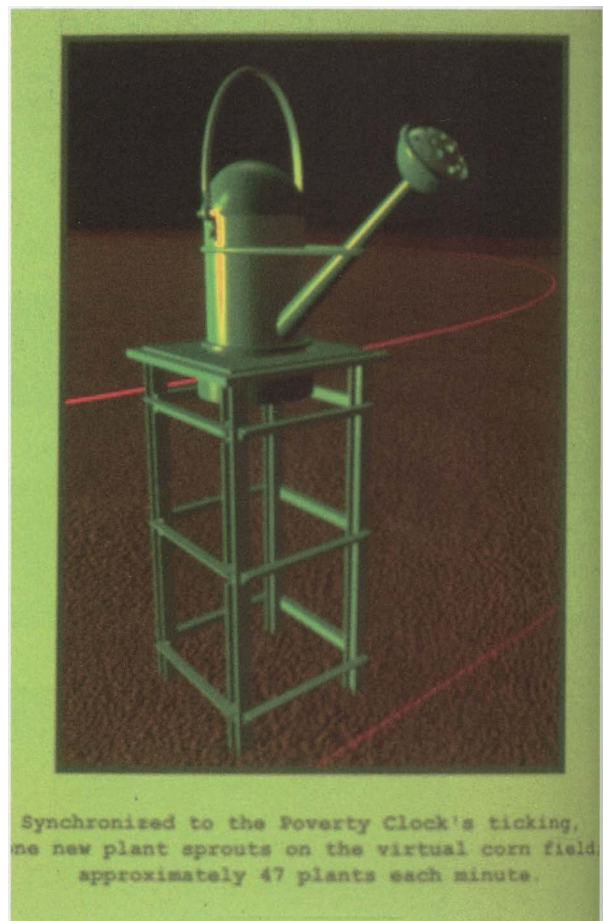**The Virtual Harvester Project**

*The Virtual Harvester* project is an effort to address the need for global commitment and action to fight one of human society's most basic problems: food insecurity. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) created the Poverty Clock to illustrate how quickly poverty grows. Each successive digit on the clock indicates another person living on less than $1.00 (U.S.) per day. Synchronized to the Poverty Clock's ticking, one new plant sprouts on the virtual corn field; yielding approximately 47 plants each minute.

In *The Virtual Harvester,* one new plant sprouts on *a* virtual cornfield with each tick of the clock, yielding approximately 47 plants each minute. Proposed to be experienced in the harbour simulator facility in Rotterdam, the project surrounds viewers with virtual corn plants, each representing a person living in poverty. Instead of a ship's bridge, the platform displays a fictional harvester cabin. In front of the viewers, virtually attached to the pilothouse, is an enormous virtual harvesting device. The device produces a loud mechanical noise (amplified by the harbour simulator's 3D sound), vibrating the pilothouse from side to side while it reaps the harvest. As the yield is blown into virtual storage trucks moving slowly alongside the pilot-house, viewers become aware of the scent of fresh grain rising from a thick layer of yellow maize that covers the entire inside floor of the simulator. As they stand protected inside the pilothouse, viewers will be able to steer the virtual combine through green virtual cornfields, leaving a trail of scorched earth behind the harvester's reaping blades. Protruding from the fields are gigantic communication towers, which serve as beacons amidst the vast virtual landscape. While viewers "play the game," it is subtly revealed (via incoming messages on the harvester's two-way radio system) that the virtual cornfields are in fact 3D visual data fields that represent the number of people living in absolute poverty across the globe.

*The Virtual Harvester* questions the motives of the Western world's immersion in information technology as it constructs "the global village." The work asks if the Western world is not paradoxically isolating itself even further from the social and economic realities of its impoverished neighbors.

"Alongside the everwidening social divisions, another apartheid is being created between the 'information-rich' and the 'information-poor.'" (excerpt from *The Californian Ideology*, Barbrook & Cameron)



Synchronized to the Poverty Clock's ticking, one new plant sprouts on the virtual corn field; approximately 47 plants each minute.

**Johann van der Schijff**
MEDIA-GN
Hoendiepskade 23 A
9718 BG Groningen, THE NETHERLANDS
schijff@scan.media-gn.nl
http://www.media-gn.nl/people/johannvdS/index.html