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Planting the Money Seed

R. Ryan Brandys

Every day I reach into my mailbox and it's the same thing: Another useless stack of junk mail. There's "**Gadget Universe!**" and "**Things You Never Knew Existed!**" and the more accurate: "**Useless plastic crap we made for fifty cents in a foreign country!**" Oh look, an ad for fart spray. Its only 99 cents, but do I really *need* fart spray? This is my brain on advertising. Tragically, there is a person somewhere whose job it was to pack high-pressure poop-smell into a can. Then they printed this advertisement on recycled paper and sent it to sit at a thousand doorsteps, all the while anticipating that an anonymous idiot like me will decide on a whim to avail myself of fart spray. Junk mail is just **beg-paper**. Here I am holding an advertisement, being asked for part of my paycheck - right in my own home! "Want to spend money? Don't lift a finger! We'll come to you!"

Advertisers are smart. They don't send an entire pound of junk mail to the people in slummy apartment complexes. These people can barely pay rent and its no use trying to beg the poor. My grandpa lives on a postage-stamp plot of land in a bad neighborhood and he's never even heard of "**PC Zone.**" So maybe the more fancy catalogues are kind of a selective thing; maybe I should be flattered that the "**Modern Yuppie Quarterly**" has chosen to anoint *my* mailbox with *their* beg-paper.

We Americans like to boast about our personal freedoms and our Bill of Rights. But no matter how many freedoms they give us in America, a freedom from advertising will **never** be one of them. This is because manufacturing a thousand cans of fart spray is the easy part. Finding a thousand idiots who can't live without fart spray is not so easy. The fart spray doesn't get sold and the company falls apart - unless it can plant the seed in everyone's brain that fart spray might be fun. They have to make us *want* fart spray. That's tough to do. But they have figured out the first step: keep people aware of the product whether they want it or not. To do that, they have to get the public's attention, because that's fertile **brain-soil**. They grab that attention just long enough to pitch their idea and plant the seed. Then all they do is sit back; they let us sad, lonely people yearn for a while about how *cool* it would be to torment our families with their fart spray. That desire sprouts and grows; it even cultivates itself, and after a time they have a whole crop of us digging through the trash for the fart spray ad we *accidentally* threw away.

Advertisers know the brain-soil is precious, and they compete for it. They know our attention is the limiting factor. We Americans already spend a third of our lives sleeping and the other two thirds either screwing off or working to pay our bills. We're very busy and our attention is naturally focused on our own lives, not their merchandise. That's why, once they're finally got us as their captive audience relaxing in front of a super-bowl commercial, they don't waste a single second. They plant that Coea-Cola seed right away, before Pepsi can. Since I only think about three products at a time (with an active mind things can get pretty crowded) that limits me to three **beg-plants** in my plot of brain-soil.

The government knows this, too. They're in league with the corporations. (Wouldn't you be if you had all the money?) Merehandisers and the White House both know that our economy - and our all-important GDP - is constrained by how efficiently the American

corporations can **till the crop of American brain-soil**. If they can plant their ideas with calculated precision and harvest us properly, we will grow to be a vast field of eager consumers. That's why the government has to shoot down the do not call list. It's why telemarketers have to call during dinner. It's why the Supreme Court personally shot down Napster. Advertising is just so precious to the fabric of our society, that we'll never be free of it. Essentially, no one is allowed to walk around with barren brain-soil.

If I wanted to live a life free of advertising, I'd have to hide in a cardboard box and never touch anything electronic ever again. I can't ignore the rest of the world out there, working hard to manufacture useless merchandise like fart spray. If they want to keep their jobs it's up to me to buy their crap. But I have enough crap! I don't want to spend my life endorsing the paychecks of others; I just want to enjoy life. A hundred years ago, it didn't used to be like this. On the frontier plains, life was hard work, but your mind was free! Your **thinking-tree** wasn't suffocating in a crowded brain-soil. You were free to sprout your own creative ideas! Today that sounds like bliss!

This makes me question my purpose here. Am I really on this planet to explore the meaning of the human condition? Do I exist to love beauty, to appreciate art, to learn about the world and use my distinctiveness to advance the human race? Or is it my lot in life - to sit back, shut up, and *spend*? Should I just let them grow their greedy ideas in my brain and willfully sacrifice my attention span for the good of economic growth? Will they even let me choose this? Or is my brain-soil already theirs? Everywhere I look I see corporations trying to stake their claim on my precious brain-soil. **Get out!** This is my personal thinking space! I decide what grows here, and it's not going to be my desire for Coca-Cola! But there's nothing I can do. Everywhere I go I'm being told what to think. Headphones are in my ears. My brain is on the box. When I drive down the highway: *billboards*. When I go on the internet: *spam*. Someone else's ideas of what I should buy - lurk in my magazines, my newspapers. I can't make it go away; I can't ignore it. If I want to watch a movie, read an article, or learn anything at all, first I've got to pay the **advertisement attention tax**. This world won't even let me *exist* until I allow it to fill my head with the desire for consumer products. It's a pretty fair trade. I get to decide where I live, what I wear, and who I think I am - *but* - they get to control what I think about. For me, they've decided it's going to be Coca-Cola, Alpine subwoofers, and fart spray. For you, it might be whipped cream, handcuffs, and Barbie dolls. But either way, this is your brain on advertising. It's a merchandising drug and it carefully alters your behavior.

You may not see it, but your brain-soil has become someone else's plantation, and it's choking your thinking-tree. Even worse, you can't defy the farmer. You're just a crop. Imagine. You are a baby sprout. Your stem thickens and you poke your head out of the dirt. Tasting the warm air for the first time, you stretch up and look around. You see a bright, glowing sun and a grove of other stalks just like you. In that moment you realize that you've all been sewn by the farmer. You only exist because he wants you here. You are here to be his **money-tree**. The farmer's name is **Uncle Sam**. He's planted his ideals in your brain-soil. He is growing an economy, and he cares about you - as long as you contribute to his **taxation-harvest**. Don't worry. He's not going to rip you out of the ground like a carrot or grind you into mashed potatoes. Instead, he wants you to grow big and strong, like a grove of oranges, so he can eat away at your **ripe wallet-fruit** a little at a time.