Edward Said, it seems to me, was consistently more animated by questions of rhetoric than questions of textuality. Rhetoric opens out into the realms of the media, state departments, and those imperial think tanks that conjure and refine phrases with which to tilt public opinion and thereby tilt the fate of whole regions of our world. To be alive to rhetoric is to be attuned to high-stakes games of persuasion, to political doublespeak, to the human costs of verbal camouflage. Textuality, by contrast, points us away from the world: it’s the kind of deadening neologism that could not be uttered without embarrassment on radio, TV, the op-ed page, or in political debate. Textuality has the whiff of infinite regress, of academics sealed against the world and interested in talking, undisturbed by history, only to themselves.

Said understood that it is far harder to theorize lightly, in public language, than it is to fob off some seething mess of day-old neologisms as an “intervention.” Throughout his career, he gravitated toward outward-facing words, words that might lead to forms of publicly communicable knowledge—to forms of understanding that might, in turn, lead to worldly change. He was impatient with jargon: be it imperial, military, or poststructuralist. While the political ramifications of subscribing to such jargon vary wildly, Said remained consistently skeptical of the way jargon becomes incrementally normalized and, in so doing, stunts critical thinking and amasses power.

His obsession with the rhetoric of power, complicity, and defiance was coupled to his suspicion of the culture—and the cult—of the expert. His dismantlings of imperial, neocolonial, and Zionist rhetoric...
developed alongside his mistrust of the teams of policy intellectuals, technocratic managers, and media-sanctioned cultural or regional commentators who surfaced, again and again, in the guise of specialists.

In the opening pages of *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, for example, Said exposes how the aesthetic object can be employed in the service of empire, disguising the savagery and misery of war; he mentions meeting an “old college friend” who knew the U.S. secretary of defense quite well at the height of the bombings during the Vietnam War. This old college friend suggests that the secretary is not the cold-blooded killer one might think him to be, as he orders the mass-bombings of indigenous populations in Southeast Asian countries, but is instead considerably more complex: the secretary, Said’s friend notes, has a copy of Durrell’s *Alexandria Quartet* on his desk—an indication that despite his position within the American war machine, he is capable of appreciating fine literature. Said notes how his friend pauses after mentioning Durrell’s name, allowing its “magic” to work its way into the conversation, camouflaging what the secretary does for his profession and, in turn, redeeming this man of the military-industrial complex.

Said suggests that Durrell’s *Alexandria Quartet* is one of those “novels of questionable worth, but definite status” in that there is an approved separation between the realm of the high-level state bureaucrat and the realm of art and literature. As Said claims, “humanists and intellectuals accept the idea that you can read classy fiction as well as kill and maim because the cultural world is available for that particular sort of camouflaging, and because cultural types are not supposed to interfere in matters for which the social system has not certified them.”

In seeking to dismantle the rhetoric that masks the connections between land mines and cluster bombs, I think of Said as an inspiration, not least for his revolt against dissociational thinking—what he called in his essay “Secular Criticism” “the petty fiefdoms within the world of intellectual production.” Yet there is a second, enabling figure behind my thinking here: Rachel Carson, an even more maverick figure, who believed that the mission of the public intellectual included exposing the euphemisms and bromides promulgated by the Cold War’s military-industrial complex. Herbicides and insecticides, Carson
insisted, were nothing less than biocides: these supposedly precise weapons in the war on pests in fact targeted nothing more precise than life itself.

It’s a measure of how recent the rapprochement between post-colonial and environmental studies is that Said never mentions Carson in his work. Yet Carson (a double major in English and biology) in many crucial ways anticipated Said’s skepticism toward the relationships among the culture of the specialist, the polluted funding structures of university research, and the impact such structures have on the production and dissemination of opaque language, disciplinary knowledge, and conventional wisdom. Both Carson and Said possessed roving intellects that showed little respect for the authority of departments and compartments. Both, moreover, felt called to expose the invisible body counts behind the rational language of the army of anointed specialists whose pronouncements shape official discourse.

“Death,” Donald Rumsfeld once observed, “has a tendency to encourage a depressing view of war.” Humans have long relied on a combination of verbal camouflage and physical distance to shield themselves from the depressing enormity of what Walt Whitman termed war’s “red business.” Each conflict brings together new euphemisms and new technologies that help us keep suffering at arm’s length, allowing us to live in states of denial distinctive to our age.

The Indian Nobel laureate Radindranath Tagore intuited this when, in 1932, he availed himself of an angle on wartime protective mechanisms unavailable to Whitman: Tagore got in a plane and flew over the Middle East. On landing in Baghdad, he met the chaplain at the local British air force base: “the Christian chaplain informs me that they are engaged in bombing operations on some Sheikh villages. . . . The men, women and children done to death there meet their fate by a decree from the stratosphere of British imperialism—which finds it easy to shower death because of its distance from its individual victims.”

Seventy-one years later death from on high once again rained down on Iraq, in a spectacle choreographed to shock and awe. By now, however, the media, primed by the pyrotechnics of the first Gulf War, embraced the idea that they were witnessing not just a miracle of military prowess but a miracle of mercy, wherein surgical strikes would take out the enemy while sparing civilians. For many, the 2003 attack
marked a clean, strategic, and moral departure from the ugly traditions of total warfare. As Hendrik Hertzberg wrote in *The New Yorker*:

> Whatever else can be said about the war against the Iraqi dictatorship that began on March 19th, it cannot be said that the Anglo-American invaders have pursued anything remotely resembling a policy of killing civilians deliberately. And, so far, they have gone to great tactical and technological lengths to avoid doing it inadvertently. . . . What we do not yet know is whether a different intention, backed by technologies of precision, will produce a different political result.4

This war, Hertzberg asserted, was not the kind that “expanded the battlefield to encompass whole societies.” Like most American media commentators at the outset of the current Iraq War, Hertzberg remained inside the smart-war mindset that bought into the idea that so-called smart bombs exhibit a morally exact intelligence. What Hertzberg failed to observe, trailing behind those luminous technologies of precision streaking across the sky, was precision’s technological shadow that for years, decades, generations will threaten the lives of random innocents, inflicting untold casualties.

The cluster bomb has become a pivotal actor in the story of smart warfare’s shadow deaths, not least because of the energetic efforts of today’s warmongers to distinguish morally between the precise, humane, discriminating cluster bomb and the imprecise, indiscriminate, and widely condemned land mine.

In 1993, the U.S. Department of State judged land mines to be “perhaps the most toxic and widespread pollution facing mankind.” The scale of land mine pollution remains forbidding: one hundred million unexploded mines lie inches beneath our planet’s skin. Each year they kill 24,000 civilians and maim many times that number. They kill and maim on behalf of wars that ended long ago; they kill and maim as if in afterthought, spreading social and environmental havoc. In neither space nor time can mine-terrorized communities draw a clear line separating war from peace.

Land mines have accrued a powerful stigma in the public imagination, particularly since Princess Diana’s walk through an Angolan minefield in 1997. Later that year, 150 nations (excluding the United States and Iraq) signed the Ottawa Land Mine Treaty, which barred the further production, transfer, and use of mines—“weapons of indiscriminate effect.” America, Britain, and their allies have in recent
conflicts (in the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon) phased out land mines and instead relied more on cluster bombs. Especially in the United States, the cluster bomb has attracted less scrutiny and less public indignation than the land mine. While the land mine has been denounced as backward and barbarous, the cluster bomb is often associated (whether officially or subliminally) with the era of advanced, smart wars, in which technological sophistication offers the promise of a more humane precision. The United States has not only used cluster bombs in more conflicts than any other nation, it has also become the most vocal advocate for this technology's indispensable and merciful intelligence.

The Blair government in Britain has rallied behind American efforts to maintain a decisive moral divide between land mines and cluster bombs. Tony Blair signed the 1997 Land Mine Treaty, but he has shown no ethical qualms about deploying cluster bombs. On the eve of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Blair's defense secretary, Geoffrey Hoon, defended cluster bombs as legitimate, conventional weapons that his troops would be at liberty to use. Likewise, questioned about cluster bombs that the United States dropped on Afghanistan, former American Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz offered a blunt retort: "we have to win this war and we'll use the weapons we need to win this war."

How distinct are the humanitarian and environmental repercussions of land mines and cluster bombs? To address this question, we need to ponder the terms themselves, for when it comes to waging war, the softenings of euphemism are no less dispensable than military hardware.

Land mines aren't called land mines in military jargon. The technically correct term is "antipersonnel mines," to distinguish them from mines that target tanks and other vehicles. "Antipersonnel," however, is one of those verbal fudgings that, under the guise of exactitude, obscures what it purports to reveal. It is a faceless word, a word without hands or feet or arms or legs. According to the United States Airforce Dictionary, antipersonnel means "designed to destroy or obstruct personnel." But who are these personnel that the mines are so "anti"? An Afghan girl, late for school, who takes a short cut across a hill. A Vietnamese herder, dreaming of dinner, while rounding up his pigs. An Angolan peasant clambering down a riverbank to fill her water jug.
A Laotian farmer, stooping to harvest his rice, who reaps blindness and amputation instead.

Webster’s defines personnel as “a group of people willing to obey orders.” So to call mines “antipersonnel” flatters their accuracy by implying that they target an organization (military or otherwise). Yet four-fifths of land mine casualties are civilians: mostly peasants and, disproportionately, children. Children’s spontaneous energy and their craving for play make them particularly vulnerable. For this reason, in heavily mined northern Somalia, mothers took to tethering their toddlers to trees. Human ingenuity has devised some 270 varieties of land mine, yet not one that can discriminate between a soldier’s tread and the footfall of a child.

Peasants cannot tend their crops or flocks without moving through their land. But to the mine’s undiscerning eye, all movement is enemy movement: any human or mammalian body above a certain weight is judged to be a body in uniform, personnel in need of blowing up. Long after the troops have returned home, long after a war’s soldiers have been demobilized, the land mine maintains its unblinking vigilance. It’s there to do its duty—even if ten, twenty years too late—retaliating against an enemy as unspecific as humanity itself. These are not antipersonnel mines, they’re antiperson mines.

“Cluster bomb” is, if anything, even more of a misnomer than “antipersonnel mine.” What distinguishes cluster bombs is less their clustering than the dispersal of their malign effects. Whether dropped from planes or ground launched, these munitions are, indeed, clustered at the moment of dispatch, but their impact across space and time is scattershot.

Part of what’s at stake here is a numbers game. Take, for example, the Pentagon’s declaration that it dropped or fired 10,800 cluster bombs during the pre-“Mission Accomplished” phase of the current Iraq War (the British deployed another 70 such bombs): given a conservative dud rate of 5 percent, this would suggest, to the casual observer, that some 550 coalition bombs failed to explode on impact, posing a long-term, landmine-like threat. In a country the size of Iraq, 550 unexploded munitions is a modest number. So the official American and British figures of 10,800 plus seventy would seem consistent with the protocol in the Geneva Conventions barring the use of disproportionate firepower.
However, to tally cluster bombs the way we tally land mines amounts to false accounting. A cluster bomb only remains a single weapon for a few seconds after it is dispatched, until its canister bursts open to deliver (depending on the model) scores or hundreds of bomblets. Each bomblet, in turn, explodes (on impact or when touched) to release a hail of sharp metal bits that can kill or injure people up to a hundred and fifty yards away.

Here’s how the Human Rights Watch Report *Off Target* describes the impact of the bomblets delivered by the CBU-130, a cluster bomb that the U.S. Air Force first deployed in Afghanistan in 2001:

The CBU-103’s bomblets . . . are soda can-sized yellow cylinders. Each one of these “combined effects munitions” represents a triple threat. The steel fragmentation core targets enemy troops with 300 jagged pieces of metal. The shaped charge, a concave copper cone that turns into a penetrating molten slug, serves as an antiarmor weapon. A zirconium wafer spreads incendiary fragments that can burn nearby vehicles.7

Let’s do the math. Each CBU-103 contains 202 bomblets, and each bomblet harbors, in turn, 300 jagged pieces. In other words, a single cluster bomb can dispatch 63,600 potentially lethal pieces driven outward by the blast wave at ballistic speed. The destructive capacity of the molten cone and incendiary fragments amplifies this threat.

Viewed this way the coalition’s use of 10,870 cluster bombs in the first phase of the Iraq War appears less restrained. Those bombs strewed two million bomblets across Iraqi cities, villages, deserts, and fields. According to Human Rights Watch, a minimum of one hundred thousand bomblets failed to explode on impact. Given that some American ground-launched cluster weapons had dud rates as high as 22 percent, the war’s final figure could be closer to half a million potentially live failures. The threat posed by each of those one hundred thousand to half a million live failures then needs to be multiplied by three hundred jagged shards.

What did all this look like from the ground?

Mohamed Moussa, who lives in al-Hilla (sixty miles south of Baghdad), described to British reporter Robert Fisk how on March 31, 2003, a hailstorm of silvery objects “like small grapefruit” descended from tumbling white canisters onto his neighborhood. “If it hadn’t exploded and you touched it, it went off immediately,” he said. “They exploded
in the air and on the ground and we still have some in our home, un-
exploded.”8 That day those “grapefruit” killed 38 civilians and injured
156 in al-Hilla alone. It’s at this point, after the initial civilian toll, that
the dud bomblets are reincarnated as landmines in all but name. Their
passive-aggressive presence has the power to rend a community’s
social, economic, and environmental fabric. Generals like to refer to
cluster bombs euphemistically as “situational obstacles,” meaning they
can be used to impede the progress of enemy troops by boxing them
in. But when, in defiance of the Geneva conventions, American, British,
Israeli, and Russian forces have fired cluster bombs into populated
areas, the failed offspring of those bombs become, long term and en
masse, “situational obstacles” to life itself.

In Iraq, to speak of the shards of memory is to make metaphor
material again. The unexploded remnants of war have assumed the
sedimentary character of that nation’s layered conflicts. Land mines
from the epic Iran-Iraq War continue to pose a hazard, their threat
redoubled by thousands more (planted by both sides) during the Gulf
War. The 24 million cluster munitions that the allies dropped on Iraq
in 1991 have compounded this hazard. How many of them continue to
strew fear across the landscape? Not to speak of the further load (from
both coalition cluster bombs and Saddam Hussein’s mines) that has
polluted Iraq’s land and waters since the beginning of the 2003 war.

The problem in Afghanistan—our planet’s most heavily mined
nation—is similarly stratified. As in Iraq, the 1980s proved to be a dire
decade for land mine pollution in Afghanistan. The Soviet occupiers
left the country densely seeded with mines, turning huge swaths of
the nation into what Lydia Monin and Andrew Gallimore have called
“the devil’s gardens.”9 The country’s Taliban-era internal conflicts
and American and British cluster bombing during the 2001–2002 war
added to that deathly crop.

Wherever troops use cluster bombs or land mines, a tangle of
economic, humanitarian, and environmental crises typically results.
National reconstruction and the safe return of refugees are impeded;
medical resources become overstretched; rural dwellers face a dia-
bolical choice between abandoning their pastures or fields and risk-
ing death or mutilation; amidst a degraded environment, pressure on
the land increases, fueling further rounds of conflict. These develop-
ments often lead to rapid deforestation and wildlife slaughter. We can
witness all these convergent ill effects, for example, in Angola. Once a lush, agriculturally self-sufficient country, its economic and medical fabric continues (despite the official end of a decades-long civil war) to be overstrained by five million landmines and the world’s highest per capita population of amputees. In Angola, desperate, displaced rural peoples have hacked down much of the country’s woodlands and decimated its once rich and varied game.

Most people forced to adjust to living amidst unexploded ordnance are rural and surviving off the land. Across the mined globe, people have found colloquial ways to convey the mad morphing of the their lands’ former fecundity: Afghanistan’s “devil’s gardens,” Cambodia’s “killing fields,” and Iraqi descriptions of cluster bomblets as strange fruit appearing in the wrong groves, as deadly oranges and grapefruits dangling from palm trees. This sense of the earth’s munificence turning demonic was evident in the language of the Vietnam War as well: the Vietcong dubbed two early American cluster bomblets (the CBU-24 and the BLU-3) the guava and the pineapple. And in a particularly resonant coinage, the Vietcong called another brand of cluster submunition the “lazy dog”: that pseudo-slumberer who takes his time to rouse himself and bite.

The submunitions that cluster bombs dispense are often gleaming and colourful; inquisitive children readily mistake them for toys or food. Some bomblets resemble striped soda cans, others green baseballs or cigarette lighters. During the war in Afghanistan, allied planes dropped two types of smallish yellow objects: cluster bomblets and humanitarian rations. Eventually, pamphlets also had to be dropped to explain the difference between them; humanitarians warned that children would simply see yellow, reach for the false food, and be blown up.

Israel’s cluster bombing of southern Lebanon in 2006 has produced a rash of deferred child deaths and mutilations in what is ostensibly a postwar situation. Ten-year-old Marwa al-Miri was one such casualty when, at war’s end, she set off on a treasure hunt with her cousin and a friend. The children had returned to their village just days before and relished the chance to play. Marwa spotted a shiny can and tossed it to her friend: the can exploded, ripping through the friend’s stomach and blasting shrapnel into Marwa’s legs and her cousin’s chest. This was not some freak tragedy but a predictable
disaster that gets reenacted every time imprecise weapons are deployed in another so-called precision war. During and after the Afghanistan War, 69 percent of casualties from unexploded ordnance were under eighteen years of age. And in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, 60 percent of such casualties in southern Iraq had yet to turn fifteen. A UNICEF report has estimated that there is one land mine for every twenty children on earth, and that figure doesn’t even include the untold number of quasi-land mines in the form of cluster bomblets.10

Like most forms of pollution, land mine and cluster bomb pollution is only semimrandom. Just as in Western nations toxic waste sites tend to be placed near poor or minority communities, so, too, unexploded ordnance pollution is concentrated in the world’s most impoverished societies: Afghanistan, Cambodia, Laos, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, among them.

It’s not just the burden of lethal war residue that is unevenly distributed between wealthy and poor nations. So, too, is the physical liberty to forget the wars themselves. As the list above suggests, many of the world’s most heavily mined societies were once Cold War battlefronts, where the superpowers fanned, funded, and armed internal conflicts, often through proxy armies. Destabilized, overarmed and, literally, undermined, many of these countries descended into serial wars. In such societies, where land mines continue to inflict belated maimings and what I call afterdeaths, the post in post–Cold War has never fully arrived. Instead, whole provinces inhabit a twilight realm in which everyday life remains semimilitarized and in which the earth itself must be treated with permanent suspicion, as armed and dangerous.

Our planet’s 100 million leftover land mines approximate, in number, the residents of California, New York, Texas, Florida, and Pennsylvania combined—except the mines are over there, not over here. As Cyrus Vance and Herbert Okun have noted, “If children walking to school or playing in a field in Manhattan, Maine, or Monterey were having their legs blown off, the U.S. government would certainly be doing everything possible to stop it. This is happening, however, in foreign places where medical care is often almost nonexistent, and physical labor is necessary for survival.”11

It costs roughly one hundred times more to remove a landmine than to lay it. The case of Kuwait after the Gulf War illustrates the
human and financial toll that mine clearance exacts. The bill for clearing that minute, New Jersey–sized country of unexploded ordnance came to $800 million. And before that clearance was complete, those mines had slaughtered several hundred Kuwaiti civilians, one hundred bomb disposal workers, and one hundred American soldiers. The figure for deminers and American troops alone exceeds the total number of U.S. forces killed during Operation Desert Storm.

Eighty-four countries now suffer from land mine and/or cluster bomb pollution. Most are far larger and far poorer than Kuwait. As a result, for example, it took demining agencies fourteen years to clear just 754 square kilometers in Afghanistan. The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that between 9 and 27 million landmines and bomblets remain embedded in Laotian soil and streams alone—relics of the huge load that U.S. forces dropped on Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam between 1964 and 1973 and during the subsequent civil foment.

The slow violence of unexploded munitions exacerbates the problem of political accountability. Postwar political changes occur far faster than environmental recovery. There remains little incentive for an administration to spend taxpayer money cleaning up lethal detritus left behind in far-off countries from a predecessor’s war. Administrations come and go, despotism is deposed, but environmental wounds outlive regime change.

The United States is one of only fifteen nations that reserves the right to continue to produce land mines. And in February 2004, the Bush administration issued a new land mine policy that put a greater distance between the American position and international efforts to universalize the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. Bush’s policy reverses a prior U.S. commitment to sign that treaty by 2006 if alternative weapons were identified. The administration’s revised stance now permits the United States to deploy long-lived antipersonnel mines in Korea until 2010 and self-destructing mines anywhere in the world. As Human Rights Watch has observed, self-destructing mines may take up to nineteen weeks to become inactive. And a significant number malfunction, resulting in the usual unpredictable mix of live and dead duds that will continue to pose a humanitarian hazard to civilians and will require painstaking demining.

No single nation or administration is responsible for the ongoing
landmine crisis. However, it does seem especially hypocritical for the Bush administration to campaign vocally for fetal rights while its weapons policies visit ruin on the unborn, who months or years hence will inherit an environment that treats them, anachronistically, as enemy personnel.

In November 2003, ninety-two countries (including the United States) approved a treaty obliging nations to clean up cluster submunitions and other explosive remnants at a war’s end. This, the first disarmament treaty that the Bush administration endorsed, could potentially help narrow the gap in international law between land mines and cluster bombs. The treaty could become a first step toward acknowledging that cluster bombs, while classed as conventional weapons, often behave more like land mines, i.e., as weapons of indiscriminate effect that contravene the Geneva conventions.

The 2003 treaty is a first step toward addressing postwar obligations. However, it has no preemptive force in a world where cluster munitions and land mines still proliferate, with lethal fecundity, faster than they can be removed. The Pentagon continues to argue that it can produce smart-weapon solutions to the cluster bomb problem, in the belief that dud levels can be reduced to as little as one percent. (That is far below the 14 to 22 percent failure rate of America’s ground-launched cluster munitions during the Iraq War.) However, the fine print in the Pentagon’s position remains chilling. It insists that in future wars that American forces will continue to include in their weapons mix old cluster ordnance, what the Pentagon calls “legacy” munitions (as if they were irreplaceable heirlooms). Those “legacy” reserves are huge: the American military has stockpiled over a billion cluster submunitions of extremely variable antiquity and inaccuracy, like the Rockeye cluster bombs developed during the 1950s and deployed in the Vietnam War and again in the 1991 Gulf War. In both those regions, Rockeyes continue to inflict long-deferred twenty-first-century deaths and injuries.

In Iraq, as in Indochina, American cluster bombing has alienated many of the very civilians that the military purported to be liberating, by instilling in their midst a material dread that outlasts the bounds of victories and defeats. As a Church of England spokesman recently put it, “You will not win the hearts and minds of a people if, in your effort to provide them with a better future, your real legacy is to
be associated with hidden deaths and hideous wounds for years to come.”

Mistrust and enduring animosity are the ultimate legacy of “legacy” munitions.

Imprecise intelligence makes even smart bombs dumb. In 2003, the United States fired rumor-guided cluster bombs into urban Iraqi neighborhoods where someone or other from the CIA’s “black list” was alleged to be hiding. Time after time, the rumor came to nothing, and civilians took the hit. Formidable human, meteorological, and environmental obstacles exacerbate the inaccuracy of these weapons. For instance, pilots hoping to avoid enemy fire may drop their bomb load from inappropriately high altitudes, expanding the broad footprint over which the bombs scatter (as happened in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan). Wind drift may drag the bomblets off course. Cluster munitions, furthermore, explode most consistently when they strike hard surfaces like roads. Soft surfaces such as sandy and marshy areas result in high live failure rates: a recurrent problem if one is fighting desert wars.

As the cluster canister disgorges its bomblets, and as the detonating bomblets in turn spew out their jagged pieces, the dispersal area widens along with the scope for inaccuracy. The resulting imprecision in space is compounded by temporal imprecision, as the remnants maintain their assaults beyond war’s end.

One of the strongest currents of America’s optimism flows from Thomas Jefferson’s vision of land as the most prudent investment, an investment that benefits both the individual and the nation. You can mint more money, Jefferson observed, but you cannot mint more land. Yet that credo seems less certain when one considers a nation like Cambodia, where four to seven million active mines and uncounted cluster submunitions have rendered half the country unsafe. To demine Cambodia would amount to a miraculous land-minting scheme, effectively doubling the country’s size without having to conquer a neighbor.

In terms of military strategy, land mines and cluster bombs are both “area denial weapons.” The problem is, too often, that “area denial” persists into the postwar era, shrinking the viable earth and straining its resources. As a first step toward alleviating this scourge, we need to acknowledge land mines and cluster bombs as two versions of one problem; we need to recognize the ease with which cluster bombs become de facto land mines.
Fifty-seven nations now possess cluster munitions and sixteen have deployed them, the United States most extensively. Ideally, we should be campaigning (along with the Mennonite Central Committee) for a universal ban on both air- and surface-delivered cluster bombs. But given the daunting pervasiveness of these weapons, it may be more pragmatic to endorse Human Rights Watch’s initial demand that all obsolete, high-failure legacy munitions be outlawed. This move ought be supplemented by a moratorium on newer ordnance until a dud rate of less than one percent can be demonstrated. But the ultimate goal should be to outlaw all cluster bombs as weapons of indiscriminate effect. To achieve such a goal, we will first have to start dismantling the whole delusory rhetorical domain of “smart wars” and “precision warfare.”

We need to demand, moreover, that the Bush administration’s regressive land mine policy be overturned, for the sake of children and adult civilians in as-yet-unimagined wars and for the sake of an environment that remains compromised wherever landmines and cluster bombs congregate. In the words of Kenneth Anderson, director of the Arms Project of Human Rights Watch, “The effects of land mines as a pollutant in the environment are just now beginning to be understood. . . . All of society pays, over and over again.”13 The same society-wide payments are exacted by cluster bomblets—those land mines in masquerade.

Notes

3. Ibid.
4. See http://www.newyorker.com/talk/content/articles/030407ta_talk_hertzberg.


