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**W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. 240 pp.  
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*Cloning Terror*, a work dedicated to the memory of W.J.T. Mitchell's mentors, Jacques Derrida and Edward Said, can be considered a continuation of Mitchell's previously acclaimed work and a fundamental tool to the understanding of contemporary visual culture.<sup>1</sup> It delivers an iconological perspective of images (both visual and verbal, metaphoric and symbolic) which attained a high status in contemporary sociopolitical reality through the 'War on Terror.' *Cloning Terror* is still a relevant work in its field, since images of terror have not yet ceased to be fabricated with a purpose, and are continually scrutinized by the media. With *Cloning Terror*, Mitchell actively battles against "historical amnesia,"<sup>2</sup> considering of utmost importance the study of the images and metaphors that arose from the War on Terror. Mitchell suggests that if the processes which led to the production of photographs of torture and violence in Abu Ghraib have not completely disappeared, then the images that represent it should also not disappear. Mitchell openly assumes this work to be an effort towards the end of the War on Terror, by itself a term which he highly discredits, comparing it to a likewise unwinnable "war on anxiety."<sup>3</sup> The metaphor, "War on Terror", is scrutinized by Mitchell, who ponders on the implications of literalizing a "literal impossibility"<sup>4</sup> through the use of military power. Mitchell understands how images can be weaponized, either in the form

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<sup>1</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

of falling towers or in the form of demolished statues, in such a way that verbal reports of the war, no matter how graphic or accurate, could never produce the same effect.

In the first part of *Cloning Terror* we find a contextualization of the beginning of the ‘War on Terror.’ Mitchell calls attention to the fact that the main concern of both the Bush administration and the U.S. media at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was the topic of stem cell research. In fact, terrorism seemed to be far from the country’s priorities, as the media published news of the limited state funding for stem cell research and the subsequent frustration of the scientific community. Mitchell thus lays the background for the comparison between terrorism and cloning, which will remain the leitmotif for the remaining chapters. President Bush’s aversion to cloning (both reproductive and therapeutic alike) is seen to be linked to his conservative and religious beliefs, providing Mitchell with the common ground from which to develop his comparison. Ultimately, his arguments draw on just how representative both cloning and terrorism are of contemporary societies’ anxieties and fears. With an original approach to iconology, Mitchell intertwines the notions of iconophobia and clonophobia, fusing the ‘Clone War’ with the ‘War on Terror,’ sustaining his argument that both were rooted on the same domestic policy. The very title of the book, *Cloning Terror*, allows this idea to shine through, evoking both fear of cloning and replication of terrorism.

In the middle section of the book, Mitchell analyses the figure of the clone, both literally and metaphorically, examining how images of terrorism were perpetually cloned through the internet, social media, etc., becoming what Mitchell refers to as “metapictures,”<sup>5</sup> even implanting themselves in the art world and pop culture. The never-ending propagation of images is also considered under Derrida’s perspective of the “autoimmune disorder,”<sup>6</sup> placing the U.S. in a hypersensitive state after 9/11, as a government incapable of discerning between a reasonable and a destructive course of action. Mitchell openly criticizes

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<sup>5</sup> A term coined by Mitchell in *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*, 45.

George W. Bush and his administration for the disastrous response to the World Trade Center attacks, partially blaming the reaction on the appeal of having a clear enemy no U.S. citizen would be expected to support (terrorists), unlike their previous nemesis, stem cell research. The main result of the ‘War on Terror,’ according to the author, was the cloning of terrorist cells plus countless casualties on both sides.

The paramount expression of this state of hypersensitivity was perhaps the usage of torture to fight terrorism, and its biggest visual scandal was very likely the broadcasting of the photographs taken at Abu Ghraib by U.S. soldiers depicting the torture and dehumanization of detainees. From the wide array of images made available to the public and referred by Mitchell as the “Abu Ghraib archive,”<sup>7</sup> he considers the image of the Hooded Man to be the most emblematic and representative of the ‘War on Terror,’ a symbol of contemporary bio-politics. In the last section of the book, Mitchell provides a visual context to his analysis of the image when he refers, for example, to the hooding of Saddam Hussein’s statue in Bagdad, when a U.S. flag was placed on the head of the head of state, signifying a symbolical form of beheading.

According to Mitchell, the figure of the Hooded Man was powerful enough to transform the image of the terrorist into that of a victim. With the introduction of this image to the analysis, another argument favoring the connection with the clone arises, for both are anonymous and faceless. The very image of the Hooded Man, “[...] not a *masterpiece* but a *master image*,”<sup>8</sup> was cloned indefinitely and used in various artistic manifestations, some of which are presented and commented on by Mitchell, who is able to show just how varied, relevant and creative the representations of the Hooded Man are without needing to extensively list all of those he could find.

Mitchell proceeds to significantly relate the image of the Hooded Man with the Christian imagery of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, a particular type of stress position. This course of analysis allowed for a stronger critique against the hypocrisy of Bush’s faith-based domestic and foreign policy that succeeded only in elevating their enemies to

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

the status of martyrs. Although *Cloning Terror* is not the only work to consider the iconographic similarities between the Abu Ghraib images and Christian imagery – Stephen F. Eisenman, in *The Abu Ghraib Effect* worked towards establishing a parallel between the Abu Ghraib photographs and the tradition of torture images in Western visual culture,<sup>9</sup> which includes (but is not limited to) Christian imagery – it is nonetheless original in its approach, accomplishing a solid correlation between images, metaphors and symbols. However, the iconographic associations in this last section of the book are not limited to Christian imagery, as Mitchell persists to find resonances with images from the Ku Klux Klan and other types of executioners, further defending that the only tangible difference between these images is either the existence or lack of eye holes in the hood.

With *Cloning Terror*, Mitchell has managed to provide a broad iconological analysis, since he draws heavily from pre-9/11 images and concepts, incorporating them in his analysis of the ‘War on Terror’ imagery, which he does not study as an isolated phenomenon. This work is also an extensive and competent attempt to understand our fears through an iconological perspective, which, in an increasingly visual-centered world, is ultimately a pertinent and valuable approach to the topic. *Cloning Terror* is, to this day and age, a valuable resource when hoping to understand the role of visual culture during times of conflict.

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2007).