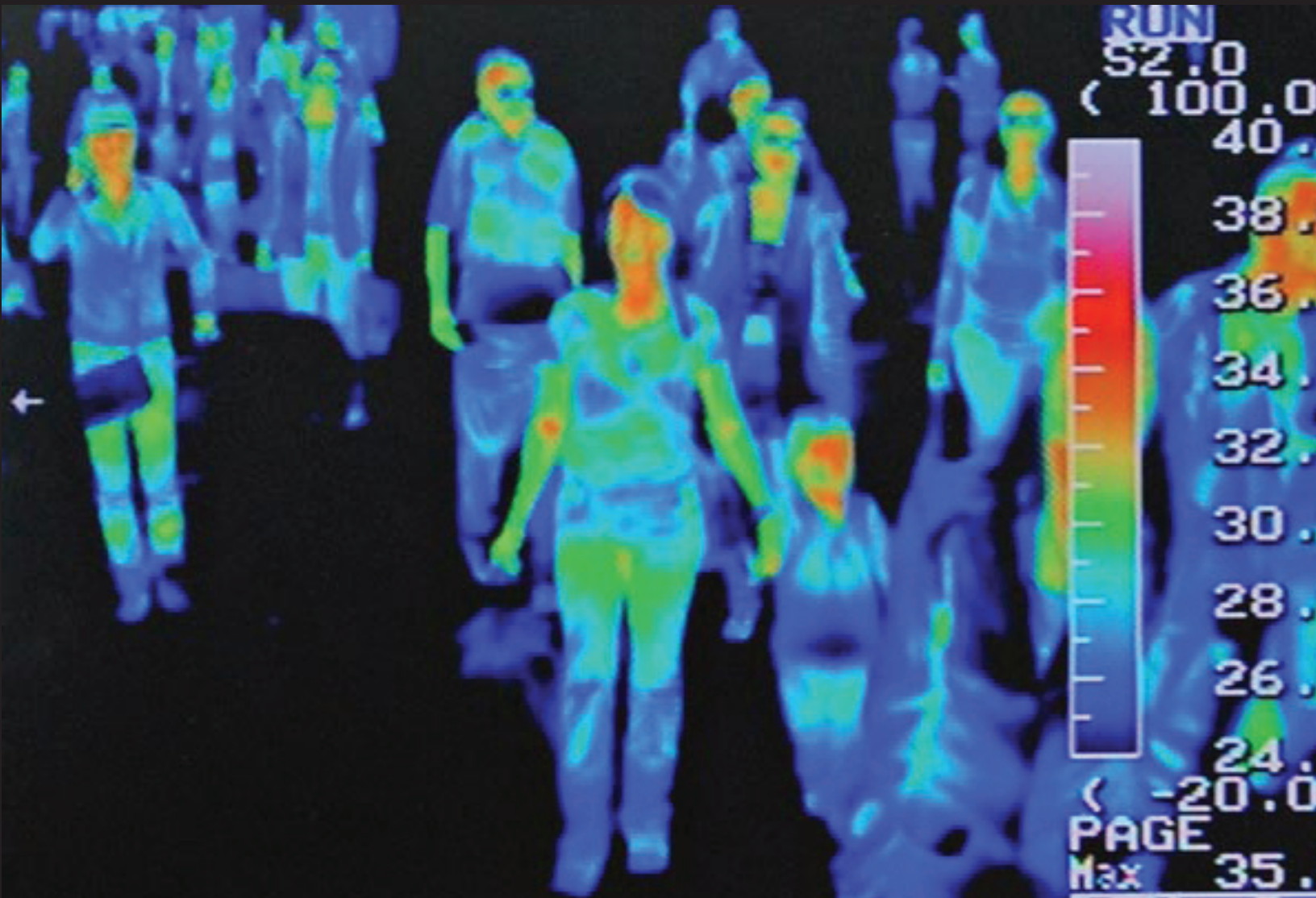


BIOPOLITICS: Life, Knowledge, Power



This course introduces the concept of “biopolitics” as a central paradigm of modern political power. Originally developed by Michel Foucault, the term “biopolitics” sought to capture a transformation in the arrangements of the modern state such that life itself, defined as biological existence, became central to projects of governance. Foucault’s famous definition of this new arrangement of power -- who is made to live, and who is left to die (Foucault 1976:180) -- has been expanded in the social sciences to include a range of critical questions. How is biological vitality disciplined and controlled? What sort of life is worth living, individually and collectively? What beings are made to survive at all costs, who can be abandoned to die, and who can be killed with impunity? What sorts of interventions are naturalized to the point of becoming invisible, or taken up as morally virtuous personal projects? What does it mean that we relate to ourselves -- and to other living things -- as bearers of biological life? In this course, we explore what new configurations of knowledge, power, and value come together to discipline, manage, optimize, and enhance biological existence. Our readings begin with core texts on biopolitics -- Foucault, Agamben, Esposito, Deleuze, and Rose -- and then branch out to examine how this concept has informed recent trends in anthropology. With an eye to the ways in which biopolitics plays out in our own everyday life, we consider the following themes: biotechnology, bioethics, security and the management of risk, biocapitalism, necropolitics, logics of social abandonment and disposability, political rights, and projects of biological and social enhancement.