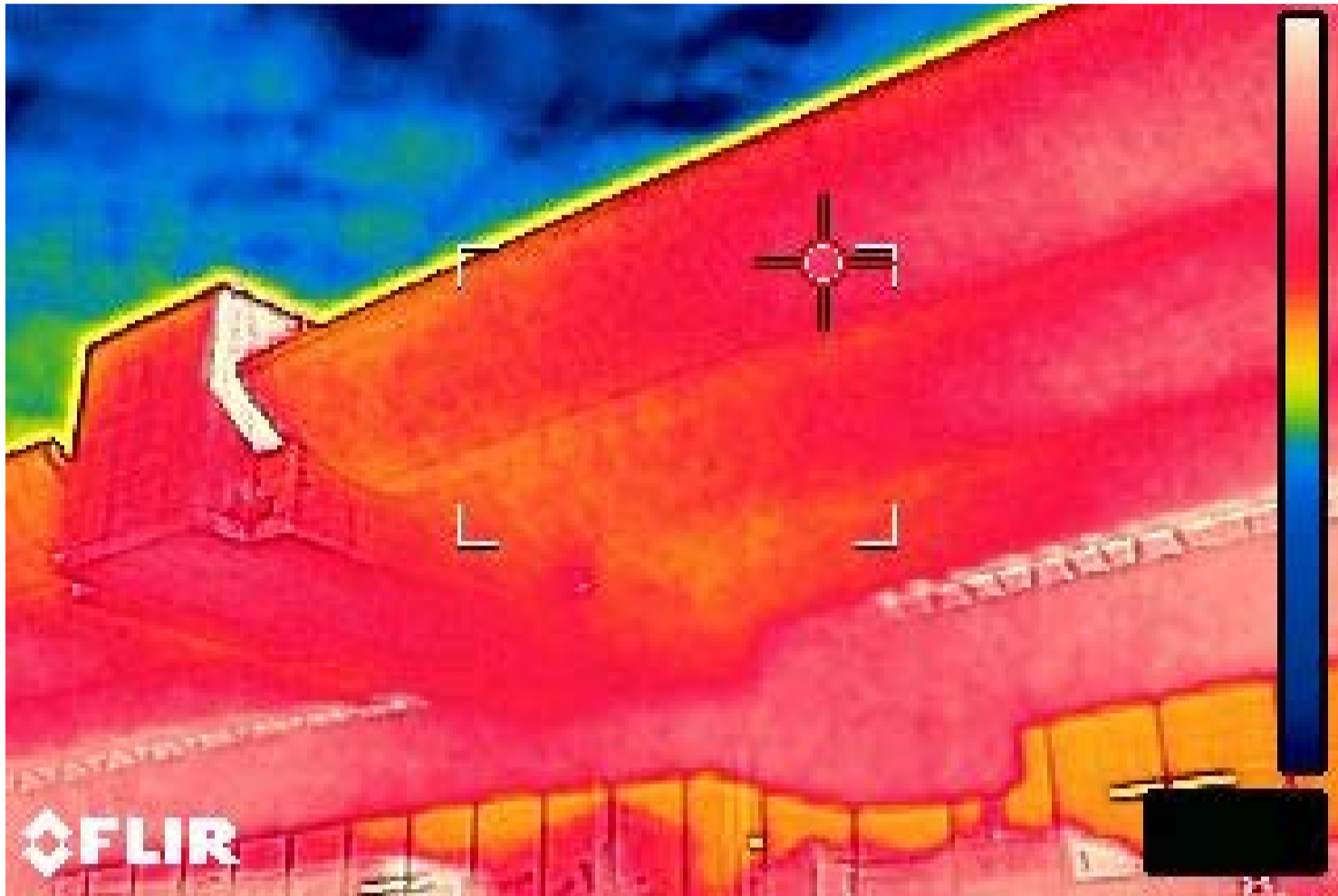


# Excess



Thermal image of the Schnellgutbahnhof by Max Vogt at Hermetschloo

Architecture today is caught in a vicious cycle of contradictions; damned if you build, damned if you don't. Damned for excessive contribution to or even causing climate change and inequality, damned by its absence to provide for a growing city like Zurich. Virtually every site in the city limits is reserved for development. Densification by replacement remains the dominant paradigm for good spatial and social governance. Hermetschloo on the Gleisfeld still lies in its first industrial conditions untouched by the excesses of development.

Densification is slowly bending to the winds of climate change with more sustainable construction, community participation and circularity. But the legacy of concrete at Hermetschloo, repeated across the country, still relies on an elsewhere along the tracks, where the messy knots of concrete and steel can be disposed out sight. Just as cement, sand and gravel, extracted far away, arrive miraculously on the back of a train, they will disappear again to be granulated and dispersed as aggregate or landfill.

The discovery that steel and concrete share the same thermal expansion coefficient transformed the 20th century. If you encase bars of steel inside concrete you produce the wonder modern material to emancipate the world. If you combine it with the railways, they act in sublime harmony: a national housing and industry programme. Separated they fall in an entangled mess of wire and rubble, aggressively opposing future reuse. It has taken a century to understand that this was one of the most carbon-emitting marriages ever, which we are still far from reforming.

This semester, we shall look at how Hermetschloo can weave new connections, repair old ones worn by use and neglect. Can ecology grow larger and more complex for the benefit of all species, maybe even humans too, whose will and need to build new habitats is real? Can Hermetschloo be its own quarry as the country's geology was for its railways? Can density exist without excess?