CT SCAN

In the cardiothoracic acute-care setting, computerized axial tomography (CT scan) is most useful for the evaluation of the pleural space (effusion, hemorrhage) and of the aorta (Figure 12.2). The CT scan, of course, is not a bedside test. Intravenous radiographic contrast, with its attendant risks (hypersensitivity reaction, volume overload from osmotic expansion of the intravascular space, acute tubular necrosis), is usually required. Exciting multiplane reconstructions are being applied to CT scans, and dramatically detailed aortic images can be obtained; CT coronary angiography is now entering its own as a potential alternative to standard catheterization laboratory coronary angiography.

The house officer should also not underestimate the risks of a “road trip” to the x-ray department in a critically ill patient. Tubes