



The Scar of Visibility: Medical Performances and Contemporary Art

Petra Kuppers

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Contemporary visual and performance artists have adopted modern medical technologies such as MRIs and computer imaging—and the bodily access they imply—to reveal their limitations. In doing so they emphasize the unknowability of another's bodily experience and the effects—physical, emotional, and social—of medical procedures. In *The Scar of Visibility*, Petra Kuppers examines the use of medical imagery practices in contemporary art, as well as different arts of everyday life (self-help groups, community events, Internet sites), focusing on fantasies and “knowledge projects” surrounding the human body. Among the works she investigates are the controversial Body Worlds exhibition of plastinized corpses; video projects by Shimon Attie on diabetes and Douglas Gordon on mental health and war trauma; performance pieces by Angela Ellsworth, Bob Flanagan, and Kira O'Reilly; films like David Cronenberg's *Crash* and Marina de Van's *In My Skin* that fetishize body wounds; representations of the AIDS virus in the National Museum of Health and on *CSI: Crime Scene Investigations*; and the paintings of outsider artist Martin Ramírez. At the heart of this work is the scar—a place of production, of repetition and difference, of multiple nerve sensations, fragile skin, outer sign, and bodily depth. Through the embodied sign of the scar, Kuppers articulates connections between subjective experience, history, and personal politics. Illustrated throughout, *The Scar of Invisibility* broadens our understanding of the significance of medical images in visual culture. Petra Kuppers is associate professor of English at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the author of *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edge*.

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