Robert A. Aronowitz. Unnatural History: Breast Cancer and American Society

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ABSTRACT “Breast cancer is all around us.” This is how Robert Aronowitz, a medical doctor, opens his timely Unnatural History: Breast Cancer and American Society. We are all familiar with the truism that “one in eight American women” will develop invasive breast cancer over the course of her lifetime. The pink ribbon has come to symbolize both solidarity and hope. Mammograms and “Self-Breast Examination” have become part of women’s daily routine, if not a spectre haunting their daily lives. Yet the evidence remains contested and the therapeutic promise, the fear and hope associated with this “obstinate” disease as problematic as ever. Unnatural History weaves all these different elements, artifactual and natural, emotional and rational, vital and morbid, in the socio-historical narrative of breast cancer in the American context. In that sense, this is an “unnatural” history, a history of how “fear” and “risk” have been reshaping a disease, which continues to be as elusive as it was two centuries ago.

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