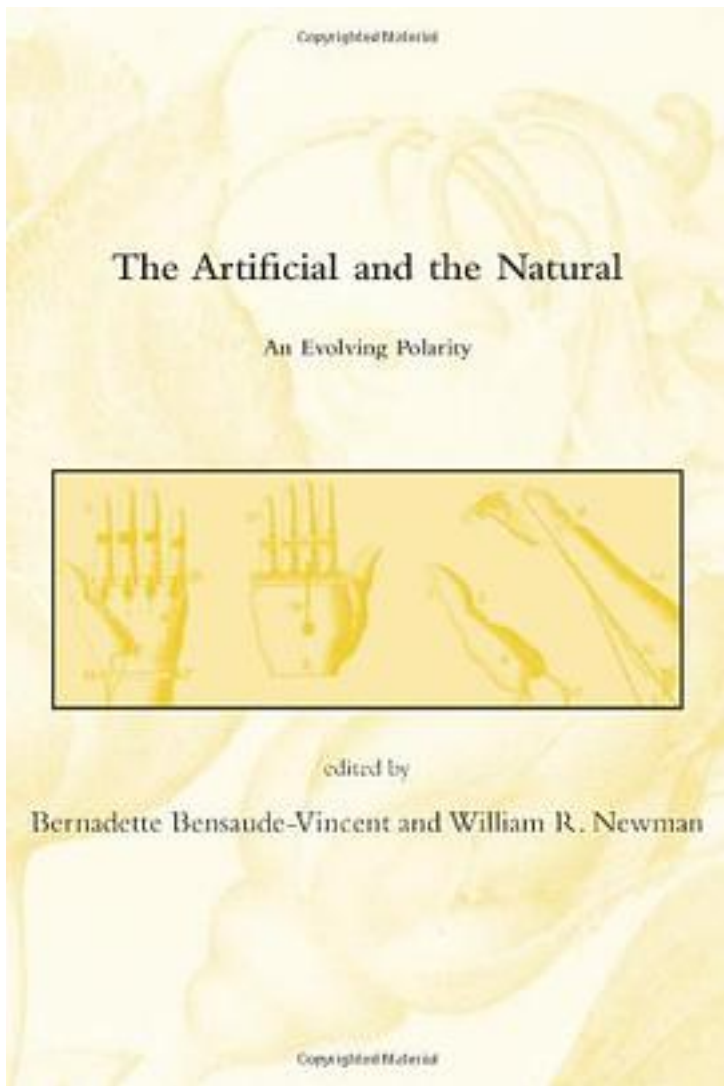


The Artificial and the Natural



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Genetically modified food, art in the form of a phosphorescent rabbit implanted with jellyfish DNA, and robots that simulate human emotion would seem to be evidence for the blurring boundary between the natural and the artificial. Yet because the deeply rooted concept of nature functions as a cultural value, a social norm, and a moral authority, we cannot simply dismiss the distinction between art and nature as a nostalgic relic. Disentangling the cultural roots of many current debates about new technologies, the essays in this volume examine notions of nature and art as they have been defined and redefined in Western culture, from the Hippocratic writers' ideas of physis and techne [note: bar over e] and Aristotle's designation of mimetic arts to nineteenth-century chemistry and twenty-first century biomimetics. These essays--by specialists of different periods and various disciplines--reveal that the division between nature and art has been continually challenged and reassessed in Western thought. In antiquity, for example, mechanical devices were seen as working "against nature"; centuries later, Descartes not only claimed the opposite but argued that nature itself was mechanical. Nature and art, the essays show, are mutually constructed, defining and redefining themselves, partners in a continuous dance over the centuries.

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