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topics (which means climate change doesn't come up much). Instead he's interested in the materials we use to meet the demands of modern life.

Have you hugged a concrete pillar today? | Bill Gates

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Vaclav Smil

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I: - Gale

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dependence and the potential for substantial dematerialization of modern economies. Making the Modern World: Materials and Dematerialization considers the principal materials used throughout history, from wood and stone, through to metals, alloys, plastics and silicon,

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Advances of the past two centuries;  
mechanization of agriculture;  
diversification and automation of  
industrial production; enormous  
increases in energy consumption;  
diffusion of new communication and  
information networks; and impressive  
gains in quality of life - would not have

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And possible without an expanding and increasingly intricate and complex use of materials. Human ingenuity has turned these materials first into simple clothes, tools, weapons, and shelters, later into more elaborate dwellings, religious and funerary structures, pure and alloyed metals, and in recent

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generations into extensive industrial and transportation infrastructures, megacities, synthetic and composite compounds, and into substrates and enablers of a new electronic world. This material progress has not been a linear advance but has consisted of two unequal periods. First was the



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very slow rise that extended from pre-history to the beginnings of rapid economic modernization, that is, until the eighteenth century in most of Europe, until the nineteenth century in the USA, Canada, and Japan, and until the latter half of the twentieth century in Latin America, the Middle

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East, and China. An overwhelming majority of people lived in those pre-modern societies with only limited quantities of simple possessions that they made themselves or that were produced by artisanal labor as unique pieces or in small batches - while the products made in larger quantities, be

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they metal objects, fired bricks and tiles, or drinking glasses, were too expensive to be widely owned.

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narrative of the origins of the modern world. Unlike most studies, which assume that the rise of the West is the story of the coming of the modern world, this history accords importance to the 'underdeveloped world'.

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population dynamics, food surpluses (and waste), abundant energy use, and expanding economic opportunities. Simultaneously, in other parts of the world, hundreds of millions remain largely untouched by these developments. Through erudite storytelling, Vaclav Smil investigates

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And the fascinating and complex interactions of these transitions. He argues that the moral imperative to share modernity's benefits has become more acute with increasing economic inequality, but addressing this imbalance would make it exceedingly difficult to implement the

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changes necessary for the long-term preservation of the environment. Thus, managing the fifth transition--environmental changes from natural-resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and global warming--will determine the success or eventual failure of the grand

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