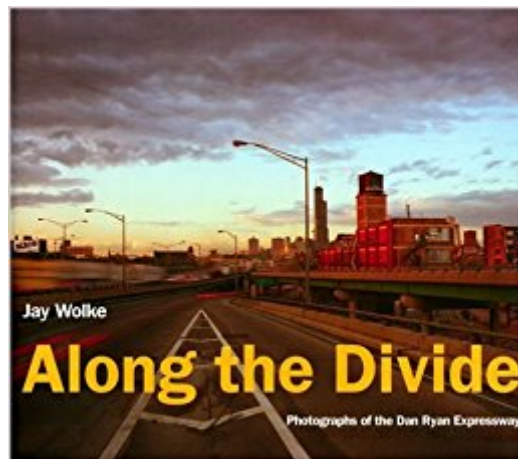




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# Along The Divide: Photographs Of The Dan Ryan Expressway (Center Books On Chicago And Environs)



## Synopsis

Cutting across Chicago's South Side in a broad swath of concrete, steel, and overpasses, the Dan Ryan Expressway is one of America's busiest, and perhaps most chaotic highways. Yet underneath the cacophony of its ten lanes lies an intriguing world of urban ecology and human networks. In *The Dan Ryan Expressway*, artist and photographer Jay Wolke unearths an ecosystem unto itself that weaves human and industrial elements into an essential feature of Chicago's identity. Between 1981 and 1985, Wolke shot thousands of photographs on and along the Dan Ryan during the day and night, traveling up and down the expressway in an effort to accurately capture it. In the twenty years since the photographs were taken, Wolke has organized his pictures into a complex and fascinating portrait of this iconic highway, which he characterizes as an "arterial organism" with its own "cycles and flows, causes and effects." The book is a dynamic narrative that explores the Dan Ryan's enormous influence over the people who drive on it, the neighborhoods lined alongside it, and the industrial environs it weaves through. As Chicago transportation officials prepare to launch a massive renovation of the Dan Ryan Expressway, Wolke here presents a historical chronicle of the development of the Dan Ryan and its rapid integration into Chicago's urban life. His photographs create an arresting visual representation of the expressway that provides an important window into the structure of Chicago's urban landscape and culture. The Dan Ryan Expressway ultimately examines where the highway fits within the trope of the American road and explores how it became "a massive expression of the urban lexicon." "As chilling as *Blade Runner*—unfortunately this is not a dystopian vision set in a distant, fictional future—this is Chicago, and this is America now. The automobile has utterly changed the landscape and our lives." Jay Wolke has found a powerful way to record this historic transformation in this unique, important photographic achievement. —Joel Sternfeld

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In this startling, strong, poignant book, the Dan Ryan is a metaphor for Chicago, a place where, every hour, thousands upon thousands gather, each in isolation. And, yet also, in the midst of a hard-to-take-in beauty." — [Chicago Tribune](#) (Chicago Tribune 2004-12-12)

Jay Wolke is professor and chair of the department of art and design at Columbia College Chicago, and the author of *All Around the House: Photographs of American-Jewish Communal Life*. Dominic A. Pacyga is a professor at Columbia College Chicago, and the author and editor of numerous books on Chicago's history, including *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago* and *Chicago*, both published by the University of Chicago Press.

Jay Wolke says in his short introduction that he took thousands of photos, between 1981 and 1985, of this serpent like highway and there is a stunning one on page thirty-three which sums up the book for me. Taken in 1982 at Exit 57B it shows downtown in the middle distance and the Dan Ryan pointing to it like an arrow. The massive width of the four inner express and three outer distributor lanes plus the Red Line CTA railway sandwiched in the middle really comes across and it's easy to appreciate how this huge construction project cut South Side Chicago in half for almost twelve miles. Other beautifully composed photos capture the highway and the surrounding environment, bridges, on and off ramps, scrap yards, the extensive human activity beneath the elevated sections. A nice touch, I thought, were several showing the Dan Ryan from windows of buildings along the route. Of the sixty (mostly landscape) photos there are several that I thought didn't quite work though. These are close-ups of moving vehicles and could have been taken on any city expressway. As well as a visual journey along the concrete there is an interesting fifteen page essay by Dominic Pacyga about the planning, building and current status of Dan Ryan. The book's production is the classic photo book style: generous wide margins and well printed in a fine screen on matt paper. There is the usual annoyance of having all the one line captions at the back rather than under each photo and there is a rather inadequate small map of the route on a page facing the

captions. This, I think, would have worked so much better if it was over a spread with small thumbnails of each photo arrowed into it. Along the Divide came across as an almost but not quite book for me. If the editorial flow had been organized differently, with more of the stunning photos (though less of the anywhere ones) and Pacyga's excellent text integrated with a more substantial map it could have been an almost perfect book about a part of America's man-made landscape.

This book is not to be overlooked. It is a must have for photographers, collectors, and anyone who wants a look into the bowels of a divided Chicago. A spectacular photobook...

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