

## **The Great American Ugliness**

By Ursa Komac, Assistant Professor in Architecture, The University of Canberra

This paper is a part of a bigger investigation and explores the causes and consequences of the Great American Ugliness. Following Heinrich Wölfflin's suggestion from 1888, that the aim of architectural history is to investigate the symptoms of decay, the subject of this paper is a look at the *Res Publica* in the contemporary USA. This paper is questioning if USA, the biggest and most powerful country in human history, is building the worst and ugliest railway stations in the world. Peter Blake's *God Own Junkyard* (1964) points out to some examples of uniquely American ugliness, but especially in light of the 1979 re-edition of the book, we find his judgement very hit and miss. Robin Boyd (1960) finds the origin of the Australian Ugliness in the United States of America. He quotes an Introduction in *Architectural Review* signed by the Editors in 1950: *"The USA might conceivably go down in history as one of the greatest might-have-beens of all time. This could be an unsuccess story of a gigantic sort and, in that sense, pleasingly American, but in every other sense a tragedy, a major tragedy for civilization, unthinkable were it not that the symptoms are there, can be scrutinized, diagnosed – just how is suggested in this issue of the Review."* Both Editors of *Architectural Review* and Boyd find England and Australia going down in the wrong American way, a world of universal low-density car dependent mess creeping over the landscape. We claim that things are now a lot worse in America than in the 60s and even the late 70s. We show some egregious examples of railway stations in the USA to illustrate our point.

Keywords: Infrastructure Architecture, Railway Station, Public space, United States of America, Ugliness