Aalto, Hugo Alvar Henrik (1898–1976) Finnish architect, the youngest by ten years of the masters of the Modern Movement (see Modernism). He set up his practice in 1922, and contributed briefly but with distinction to the body of work known as Nordic Classicism, of which his Swedish neighbours, *Asplund and *Lewerentz, were the dominant figures. This was just when Scandinavia was engaging with the ambitions of the Modern Movement, which were to be brilliantly celebrated in Asplund's Stockholm exhibition of 1930.

In 1927 Aalto won the competition for a public library in Viipuri with a project that evolved quickly from Nordic classicist precedent into an inspired interpretation of the new values. His approach was fundamentally functionalist, but was unique in its attention to the personal experience and participation by the users of the building. Thus the conditions of study (and in particular the incidence of both natural and artificial light upon the working surface of the book) were explored in a refreshingly direct way. This sensitive response to the needs of the user of the building was highly original, and led in each case to an innovative solution. In a parallel project for a tubercular sanatorium, he carried out an original analysis of the particular comfort conditions appropriate to the sensibility of the patient. This approach underpinned the ethos of all his work and radically differed from the grand abstractions of the Rationalists.

The result of this first period of his work up to 1939 was an outstanding portfolio of masterpieces of striking originality, which won for him accolades from both Le Corbusier and (rare indeed) Frank Lloyd Wright. The outstanding buildings were the office headquarters for Turun Sanomat newspaper in Turku, the Sanatorium at Paimio (1932), the Viipuri Library (1934), his own home and office in Helsinki (1937), the Villa Mairea (1939), and two major Exhibition pavilions, at Paris (1937) and New York (1939). This group of buildings was accompanied by an equally original range of furniture and light-fittings, sensitively adapted to the user's perception and sense of touch. All in all this constituted an impressive body of work completed by the age of 40.

From the earliest period of his work until his death in 1975, he poured out a series of writings and lectures, compiled by his biographer Goran Schildt in *Alvar Aalto in his own words* (1998). His central line of argument was typified by the challenge that he put down in 1927: "What is the purpose of new form if there is no new content?" This he continued in outstanding contributions such as *Rationalism and Man* (1935), *The Humanizing of Architecture* (1940), and *The Architectural Struggle* (1957). In assessing the current state of affairs in 1940, he announced: 'It is not the rationalization