face each other in startling clarity on adjacent sites in Berlin: Mies van der Rohe's National Gallery on one side of the road, Hans Scharoun's Philharmonie and his State Library on the other side. 'Nowhere else in the world of building is there a debate of such intense polarity nor exemplars of such authority' (Wilson, 1996, p.101). It is a debate which is also inherent in two of his major projects: the Civic Centre in Liverpool and the British Library in London.

The Civic and Social Centre was to stand next to St George's Hall by Harvey Lonsdale Elmes of 1840 – 54, a striking neo-classical monument on a podium. The centre is a strongly geometric design with a pin-wheel plan; slab-like offices straddle the contours and set up urban axes. Elmes's work shows an awareness of Schinkel whose Altes Museum (1823 – 30) in Berlin, and particularly its open portico, Wilson greatly admired. The design for the Civic Centre faced a good deal of public criticism. It was a gesture that arguably was an aggrandisement of civic authority and no longer meshed with public perception; its era had passed. Due to a variety of reasons, including financial stringency, the project was eventually abandoned.

When Sandy Wilson turned to the design of the British Library (now divorced from the British Museum) on its new and larger site, Scharoun rather than Schinkel was dominant. It was the organic tradition, what Wilson called the 'other tradition', which would mould the design and especially the general character. The British Library was in effect the national library and the library of 'last resort' and thus clearly a building of national significance; probably justifiably a monument. But monumentality and modern architecture were in many minds uncomfortable companions. Lewis Mumford had written in 1938 in his undeniably influential *The Culture of Cities* that 'the notion of a modern monument is veritably a contradiction in terms: if it is a monument it is not modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument' (Mumford, 1940, p.438). Monumentality was in Mumford's view and that of many others linked to classicism

and its more recent expression, neo-classicism as exemplified by the public buildings of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, for example. This was considered alien to an architecture of democracy. Hitler's and Speer's misappropriation of a gargantuan classicism only reinforced widely held opinion; the architecture of the enlightenment was vulgarised and entrapped as the architecture of fascism.

Alvar Aalto, primary exponent of the other tradition, became an appropriate model for the design of the library on its new site. Aalto had in fact spoken of democracy and architecture and, perhaps somewhat patronisingly, of an architecture for the 'little man'. Since winning a competition for the design of a local library in 1927, Aalto had designed a number of significant libraries in Finland and Germany – at Viipuri, Wolfsburg, Seinäjoki, Rovaniemi – but it was not the functional aspects of these buildings which were a precedent but their visual appearance, their style, though this label would, I suspect, be anathema to Wilson.

The obeisances to Aalto are visible in the horizontal massing, the sloping roofs, the use of red brick, the protection

Right
Alvar Aalto Institute of Technology, Otaniemi 1955 – 64, main auditorium ceiling