



Article

The Fold as a Design Strategy: Analogy between Architecture and Issey Miyake's Work

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Abstract: There is a notable similarity between the objectives of Architecture and Fashion Design. Both disciplines aim to protect and establish a sense of identity for their users. Similarly, analogous design strategies may be employed. One such strategy is the fold. The act of folding a surface results in the formation of a three-dimensional volume. The intrinsic two-dimensionality of the surface gives rise to the formation of space, which is characterised by three dimensions. The air that is trapped by the envelope provides the necessary space for the users. In the context of clothing, the enclosed space is relatively limited and personal. In contrast, in the field of Architecture, the space is of a larger scale and serves a collective purpose, accommodating a variety of activities. Consequently, the processes of designing a building or a piece of clothing are analogous, differing only in terms of scale, time, and materials. The employment of the fold as a point of departure for architectural and Fashion Design projects entails a comparable design process in which concepts such as continuity, superposition, and faceting are associated with this folded mechanism. Consequently, the resulting outcomes, particularly those pertaining to mass and aesthetic perception, exhibit notable similarities.

Keywords: architecture; fashion; pleat; fold; space; surface; envelop



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1. Introduction

The principal function of clothing is to safeguard the wearer from the effects of external conditions, including those that may pose a risk of injury or harm, whether from the natural environment, animals, or other individuals. Similarly, Architecture provides a protective environment that allows for activities and interactions among individuals. The provision of identity and the conveyance of values, dependent on design, material, form, and so forth, is an intrinsic function of both buildings and garments.

Nevertheless, the objective is not the sole point of convergence between these two disciplines. Both fields have a history of sharing forms, materials, tools, meanings, and even languages. My research programme has been developed over a number of years and is based on a similar methodology. This article will present a theoretical comparison of the design strategies employed in both Architecture and Fashion Design, illustrated with practical examples. In this instance, the fold will be examined as a mechanism for generating form and space.

From an etymological perspective, the term 'fold' is used to describe the technique of folding fabric or paper by hand. The term is defined as a manual action intrinsically related to Fashion, in the case of the former material, and to papermaking and origami¹, in the case of the latter. As a mechanism, the fold serves to transform a plane into a three-dimensional object. From a theoretical standpoint, the fold is associated with the concept of continuity and the notion of harmonious unity. Furthermore, the fold is associated with the ambiguity between the interior and exterior, as well as the visible and the invisible. In the view of Gilles Deleuze, the fold enables the transformation of reality, the accumulation of layers, and the creation of multiple facets that contribute to a constant transformation of reality in

a continuous manner. The act of folding, pleating, and tucking imbues reality with a sense of dynamism and complexity, facilitating a fluid and interconnected transformation.

“The fold never disappears; it ceaselessly unfolds and refolds within each of its folds. The fold continues to infinity”. (Deleuze 1993)

“The fold goes to infinity, that is, its two faces continuously fold over on each other. A fold can be as open as it is closed, without losing its continuity or complexity”. (Deleuze 1993, *Ibid*)

The process of folding is the mechanism by which a flat, two-dimensional surface is transformed into a three-dimensional volume, whereby air is trapped between the valleys and ridges that define its surface. One might posit that the fold is a space generator. As Deleuze correctly observed, this mechanism has been a recurring feature of design in a variety of contexts throughout history. In music, the work of Boulez provides an example of this phenomenon; in Architecture, the Baroque period demonstrates a relationship between the infinite and the composite; in abstract painting, the continuity and complexity achieved through repetition or multiplicity, as exemplified by the works of Michaux, Mondrian, Hantai, Vasarely or Pollock; and in sculpture, the folding of sheets (regardless of the material, whether paper, clay, metal, etc.) has been a common practise in early 20th-century sculpture, as evidenced by the works of Oteiza or Palazuelo.

Similarly, pleating has been a recurring technique in the construction of garments. For example, the pleated tunics of the Greco-Roman civilisations, in which pieces of fabric ‘hanging’ from the neck and shoulders wrapped the bodies with an excess of material that originated irregular folds in favour of gravity, creating an image of grooves similar to the wing of the columns of the temples, only interrupted by a girdle that was tightened around the waist. The traditional *kilt*, a pleated men’s skirt typical of Scotland and Ireland, was introduced by the Vikings who conquered northern Europe in the 9th century. In their original form, they were similar to ancient tunics, being worn around the waist and fastened with a belt, which gave rise to the pleats. Additionally, the enigmatic *Delphos*², a collection of natural silk dresses inspired by ancient Greek design, was created by the artist Mariano Fortuni in 1909. The precise method by which the fabrics were folded remains a mystery. According to legend, after Fortuni’s demise, his wife discarded all the materials and tools utilised in the process into the canals of Venice. It is also noteworthy that the industry responsible for producing these ‘textured fabrics’ has developed significantly since the 18th century. The symbolism associated with these fabrics, which are often associated with power and wealth, is a reflection of the large amount of material required for their production.

Throughout his career, Issey Miyake has studied the fold from a variety of geometric perspectives. These include regular and repetitive folds, as exemplified by the *Pleats Please* project, and irregular and unique folds, as seen in the *132.5* project.

What makes Miyake’s work particularly intriguing in the context of Architecture is the spatial quality of his garments, which leave a gap between the envelope and the wearer.

2. The Homogeneous Fold: Repetition and Homogeneity

Issey Miyake (1938–2023) was a highly esteemed Japanese Fashion designer who devoted his entire professional life to the creation of innovative Fashion designs based on rigorous experimentation with both forms and the materials and tools utilised in the process. His designs are defined by two intimately connected characteristics, namely the fold and amplitude. His designs feature structures created from folds that are separate from the body, which they are worn by. This results in the formation of a space between the body and the envelope itself.

The *Pleats Please* project is based on the utilisation of micro-pleating, which enables the garment to mould, expand, or contract in accordance with the contours of the body. Such designs may be considered analogous to the concept of ‘*opera aperta*’, whereby garments lacking a discernible structure and form assume a distinctive character and definition upon

contact with the body. This imbues the garments with a sense of vitality, autonomy, and movement in parallel with the body (Figure 1). The clothing functions as a facade that, with autonomy, defines its own identity; nevertheless, its form is inevitably shaped by the body it shelters. These garments present an ambiguous character, simultaneously occupying minimal space in their folded condition and extending far beyond the body's limits. Such garments may be considered analogous to an accordion, wherein each fold can be filled or emptied of air.



Figure 1. Fashion show of *Pleats Please* (1989).

The regularity, uniformity, and repetition in pleating imbue the garments in the *Pleats Please* project with an aura of infinity and malleability that is difficult to find in architectural projects, except in the case of the IBM pavilion designed by Renzo Piano in the 1980s. The ephemeral and itinerant pavilion (which was transported to parks and public spaces in twenty European cities between 1982 and 1986) behaved like an envelope capable of adapting to different locations and needs (like Miyake's garments) through a series of laminated wooden arches anchored to a set of polycarbonate tetrahedrons. The repetition and addition of these arches resulted in the formation of a vault (Figure 2). While the system devised by the Italian architect permitted spatial adaptability in a single direction (the longitudinal direction of the pavilion), the strategy employed and, complementarily, its aesthetics are comparable to those of the Japanese designer. The system of adaptability, based on the addition or subtraction of modules, enabled the pavilion to expand and contract in a manner analogous to the way in which Miyake's garments adapt to different body types, reflecting a conceptual approach that emphasises universality. The fact that the structure was designed as an envelope that is alien to its content but capable of housing

multiple display systems, similar to the disconnection between the shape of the body and the shape of the clothes, is a unifying concept that can be seen throughout Miyake's body of work.

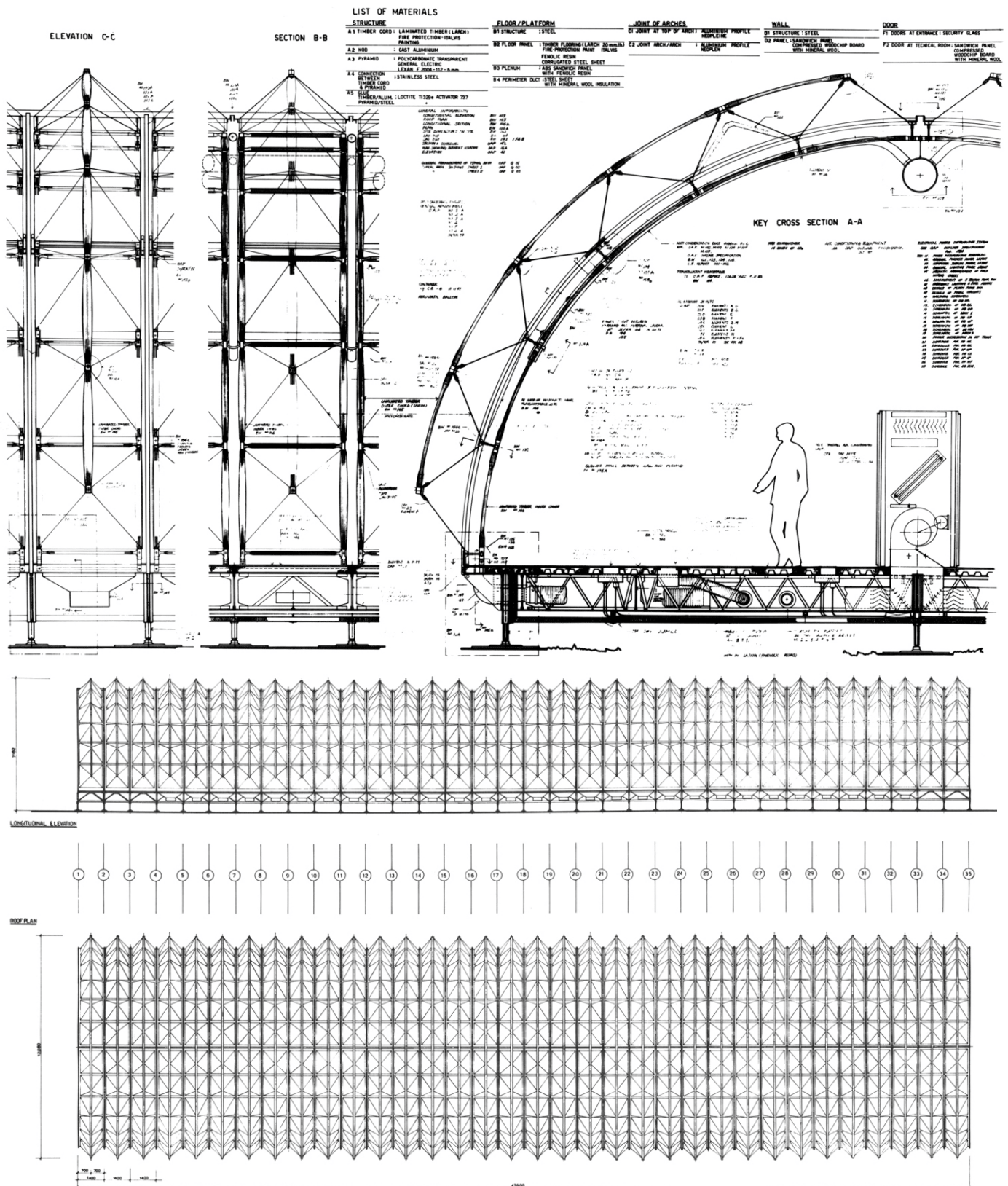


Figure 2. Designs of IBM pavilion by Renzo Piano.

This disconnection between the envelope and the body can be justified by two theories, which, in addition to being non-exclusive, could equally influence the Japanese artist's work.

The incongruence between the form of the body and that of the garment constitutes the primary theme in Miyake's oeuvre. This may be attributed to two distinct theories, which are not mutually exclusive and could have equally informed his work. On the one hand, the influence of traditional Japanese clothing, exemplified by the kimono, represents a non-anthropomorphic approach to Fashion Design. The aesthetic philosophy of *wabi-sabi*, which embraces the natural imperfections of things, and *kanso*, where simplicity and purity are imposed as main conditions in seeking the functionality of objects, justify, along with other values such as decorum, simplicity, comfort, and versatility, that the kimono and, by extension, Japanese Fashion deviate from the human measurements and contours that govern the Japanese pattern-making system. Alternatively, Miyake's survival, albeit with lasting effects³, of the atomic bomb that devastated his hometown of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 undoubtedly influenced his design approach.

"When I close my eyes, I still see things no one should ever experience: a bright red light, the black cloud soon after, people running in every direction trying desperately to escape—I remember it all". (Miyake 2009)

In light of this, it can be argued that his designs should be viewed as more than just architectural structures; they should be regarded as individual shelters, places to inhabit, and seek refuge from the external dangers that humans may face, including those caused by a nuclear attack.

3. The Irregular Fold: Unity and Uniqueness

The 132.5 project⁴ represents a new line of research and design of garments based on folding, yet with notable divergences from the generative concept of *Pleats Please*. The nomenclature of the 132.5 line of garments is derived from the conceptual framework that informs their design. The process begins with a single piece of fabric (1), which is transformed into a three-dimensional object (3). Through the application of folding techniques, this object can be folded onto itself, resulting in a two-dimensional plane (2). The final digit, 5, represents the fifth dimension. In addition to the three dimensions inherent to the physical and volumetric properties of the garment and the fourth dimension associated with movement and time, the fifth dimension⁵ is represented by the realm of human existence, as exemplified by the designer Miyake through the depiction of people and their relationships. In other words, the pieces are designed to unfold into a three-dimensional form that is independent of the wearer. The pleating of the fabric creates a unique volume that can accommodate a body with a shape that is distinct from the wearer's natural form, in contrast to a conventional garment, which assumes a three-dimensional form when worn by an individual.

To develop each piece from a technical perspective, Miyake collaborated with computer engineer Jun Mitani⁶, who created a bespoke programme that enabled the design of garments through a mathematical algorithm. The design process commenced with the creation of each garment in three dimensions. Subsequently, through triangulation, each garment was decomposed into a flat, two-dimensional object through the application of folding techniques. This was accomplished by first defining the design virtually on the computer and then creating a physical paper model to determine the placement and size of the folding lines that would transform the garment back into a plane. The inaugural collection for the 132.5 line comprised ten flat patterns that yielded a total of twenty-nine distinct garments and accessories. This exemplifies the capacity of a pattern with a specific two-dimensional shape to generate diverse volumes. In a manner analogous to the Japanese art of *origami*, wherein the surface of a figure is distinct, and the act of folding merely alters the direction of the plane without disrupting its continuity, the garments eschew the use of seams, instead being joined by heat where necessary to close the garment. Once the design of each piece was finalised and its folds defined, these were transferred to

the fabric. The fabric was a blend of white-toned cotton and shiny black recycled polyester, with the addition of copper and military green dyes, which imbued the final collection with its distinctive visual character. The fabrics were subjected to a heat press treatment to guarantee the durability of the folds and to achieve crisp, precise axes. The ten flat patterns, which did not reveal the garment until it was unfolded, were composed of a variety of polygonal shapes, including stars, triangles, rectangles, and octagons.⁷ (Figure 3).

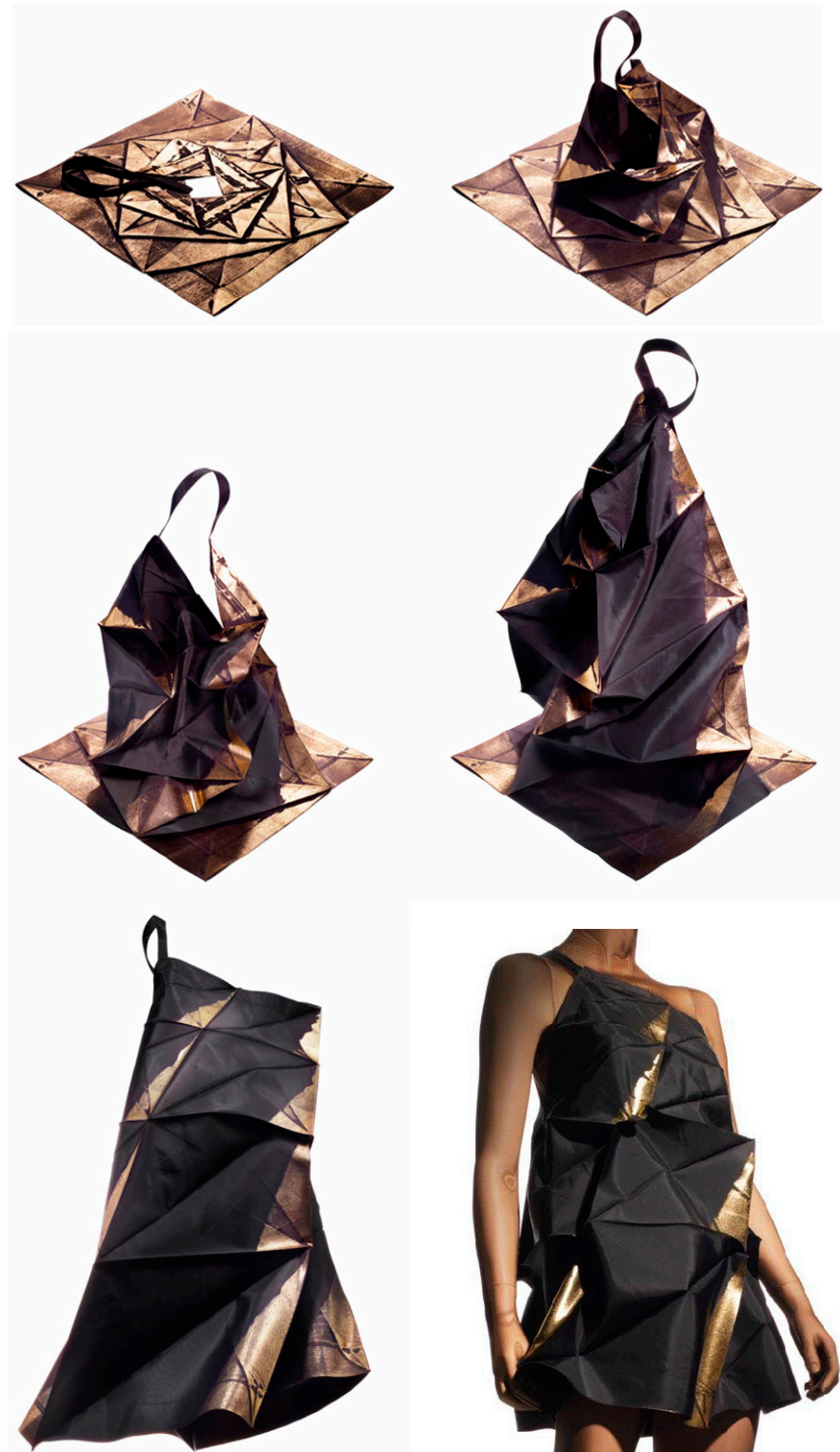


Figure 3. The 132.5 dress. ©Issey Miyake Inc., Tokyo, Japan.

In pursuit of the most sustainable and versatile designs, Miyake incorporated a range of accessories, including discreet fasteners such as brooches, which enabled the pieces to be joined, shapes to be varied, and lengths to be modified.

“These clothes are very light, like air, and are season-less”. (Thoma 2010)

“I hope people will keep them a long time, and not replace them every two months. That, for me, is the essence of sustainability”. (Íbid)

Although the influence of the geometric silhouettes of Givenchy, with whom Miyake worked in Paris at the beginning of his career, has been alluded to, 132.5 follows in the footsteps of other projects by the Japanese designer, such as *Pleats Please* or *A-POC*, in which not only sustainability or universality are sine qua non-conditions, but also consists of an exercise in finding the balance proposed in *East Meets West*⁸, seeking a balance between tradition and modernity, designing generous, democratic and non-anthropomorphic pieces using the most innovative technologies and materials.

In Architecture, the strategy developed by Issey Miyake in the 132.5 research is applied through the concept of a volume created as a ‘cutout’, meaning that the envelope it generates comes from the act of folding a plane to achieve three-dimensionality and encloses a space, like an *origami* figure. This method is often used to design buildings from their massive aspect, creating Architectures whose continuous and faceted envelope can be developed (unfolded). The digital design tools used in Architecture facilitate this type of strategy so that, as in the case of *La Capilla en Valleacerón* (1997–2002) by the S-M.A.O. studio, it is possible to start from a box, a simple and regular volume, and, through experimentation, fold, tension and deform the envelope of this box, which, thanks to the folding, is understood as continuous.

“The Chapel piece is developed around the study and manipulation of a “box-fold”, focally tensioned”. (description of the project by S-M.A.O team)⁹

Sequential photographs of the design process show how a single sheet of paper is folded into its final form. The series of photographs reflects how each one, like a frame in a film, depicts the sequential movement of the folding process (Figure 4).

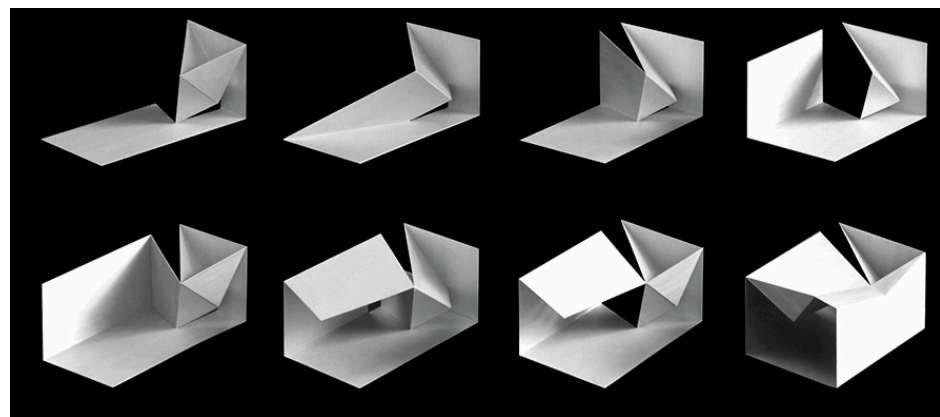


Figure 4. Fold the process with the paper model. ©S-M.A.O.

Another example of a building whose shape is derived from the folding of a single plane, the folds of which create a carved volume, is the *Casa da Musica*, built by OMA in the city of Porto in 2001.

At the end of the 1980s, the Dutch team began to experiment with the folding of continuous planes as a generator for projects such as the *Kunsthall* Museum in Rotterdam, the *Educatorium* building for the University of Utrecht, and the Dutch embassy building in Berlin, in which the continuous plane mimicked the physical fold, i.e., the edges created by the different directions of the panels were emphasised, visually forcing the perception of a fold. Continuity was thus relegated to space (emphasised by the homogeneity of the

material), which, despite the fragmentation of the surrounding surfaces, is perceived as unique and fluid. A similar solution was adopted two years later, in 1999, for the Seattle Public Library, where the envelope is not a simple, transparent cube but is made up of sloping surfaces at different levels, giving the façade a dynamic and light appearance. The substructure, on which the glazing that forms the envelope rests competes with the overall geometry of the carved volume so that the continuity between the faces is not perceived, and the envelope does not yet read as a single folded plane.

Following this research into faceted surfaces (first in structural surfaces and then in envelopes), the Dutch team designed the cultural building in the Portuguese city, in which the volume is sculpted like a rock, with irregular but continuous planes (the fact that the envelope is made of concrete helps to emphasise the idea of continuity). Rem Koolhaas has explained on several occasions that the sculpted stone form (Figure 5) is a reflection of the demands on form and space created by the need to house two music halls and that the slopes of the outer shell are a reflection of the oblique planes necessary for the two halls to fulfil their acoustic function. Whatever the validity of the justification for the external form (both Fashion and Architecture are driven by a desire for novelty. This is a fundamental human quality that drives the evolution and modernisation of design), the reality is that the relationship of the entire envelope to the rest of the spaces: cafeteria-restaurant, circulation areas, service areas. . . describes a free form alien to these other uses, similar to the relationship established by the 132.5 garments to the body, in which the envelope is independent of it. This mechanism of creating a purely formalist building, whose envelope, which can be generated from a folded plane, is alien to the content, was tested in the unbuilt project of the Y2K House¹⁰, in which Rem Koolhaas's studio by experimenting with the deformation of the box, tried to create a faceted solid from a continuous envelope, similar to the idea developed for the Portuguese theatre, which is so reminiscent of the concept of the 132.5 garments.

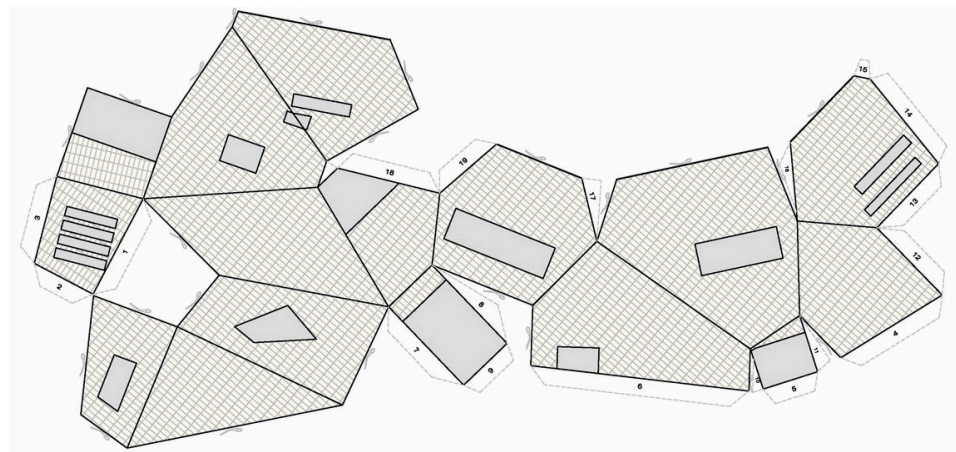


Figure 5. Drop-down plan of the envelope of *Casa da Musica*. ©OMA.

The concept of continuity and folding goes beyond the building itself, colonising the public space that surrounds it. The planes closest to the bearing surface create a kind of extension with the city, as can be seen in the way the access staircase reaches the street level, simulating a broken carpet that extends the ground plane, making the former public space function as a meeting, waiting and leisure area, a space that the building lacks, since the *Casa da Musica*, by design, does not have the typical entrance hall (foyer) that this type of building usually has; even the slopes of the cantilevered areas create sheltered spaces as if they were canopies. All this means that the building is not understood as a mere figure leaning against the city, but it helps to establish a dialogue with it, strengthening the link beyond the inside-outside relationships created by the openings integrated into the faces of the volume (Figure 6).

“Most cultural institutions serve only part of a population. A majority knows their exterior shape; only a minority knows what happens inside. With *Casa da Musica*, OMA wanted to address the relationship between the Concert Hall and the public inside as well as outside the building”. (Rem Koolhaas 2001)



Figure 6. *Casa da Musica* in Oporto by OMA. ©Philippe Ruault.

The *Agora Theatre* is another example of a building where the envelope is a surface formed by irregular and continuous planes created by the use of folding. The building, designed in 2007 by UNStudio and van Berkel and Bos Architectuurbureau, is part of the master plan for the regeneration of the city centre of Lelystad. The authors wrote about the project:

“The *Agora Theatre* has a kaleidoscopic, upbeat character, expressed through its multi-faceted and colourful appearance. The different facade components provide constantly changing perspectives and shapes, an invitation to the world of the performing arts, where one can never be sure of what is real and what is not. On the north and west, glass openings connect the inside and outside worlds, while the east and south facades accentuate diagonal-shaped views. Through the building, drama and performance are not confined to the stage or the soirée, but rather extended to a 24-hour urban experience”. (UNStudio 2007)

The large volume, made of steel plates and laminated glass in shades of orange ranging from red to yellow, rises out of the city like a stone with planes in different directions (Figure 7). It houses the main theatre hall, which gives the building its purpose, as well as other smaller multifunctional spaces, circulation and meeting areas, a cafeteria, a restaurant, and public service areas. Although the team defends its angular shape against a more theoretical and poetic discourse:

“All facades have sharp angles and jutting planes (. . .) These protrusions afford spaces a continued offstage spectacle of display, where the roles of performer and viewer may be reversed”. (UNStudio 2007, *Ibid*)

Its shape, according to the authors, results from the placement of the concert halls at the furthest ends of the volume in order to avoid sonic interference between them in the event of simultaneous use. These halls, like the *Casa da Música* in Porto, have a configuration dictated by acoustic requirements. This is transferred to the outer shell of the theatre. Unlike the OMA building (Figure 8a), where the floor plan shares the same language as the envelope (so that all the graphic documentation of the building—plans, sections, and elevations—describe similar figures), the *Agora Theatre* has an almost regular rectangular floor plan (Figure 8b), and the distribution of spaces is based on a loop with the amphitheatre of the main hall at its centre. The layout corresponds to the circulation

areas of the building, where a large ramp traverses a kind of vertical lobby, making the space flow and remain continuous both vertically and through the figure-eight path of the ramp. Like the 132.5 garments, the interior space is continuous and independent of the exterior envelope, which responds to a more plastic intention; both the ramp and the lobby, analogous to the body that inhabits Miyake's garments, move away from the enclosure and have their own identity.

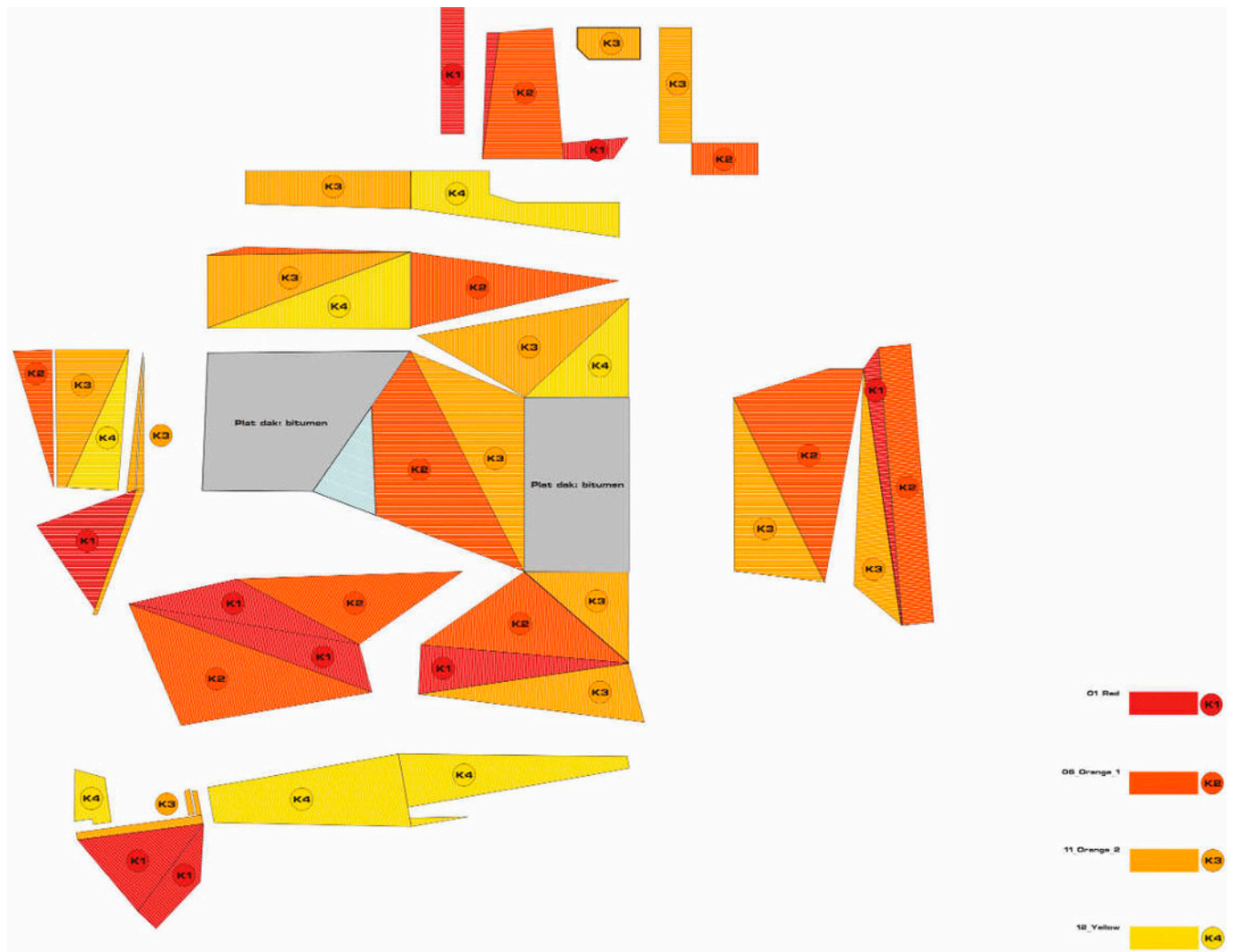
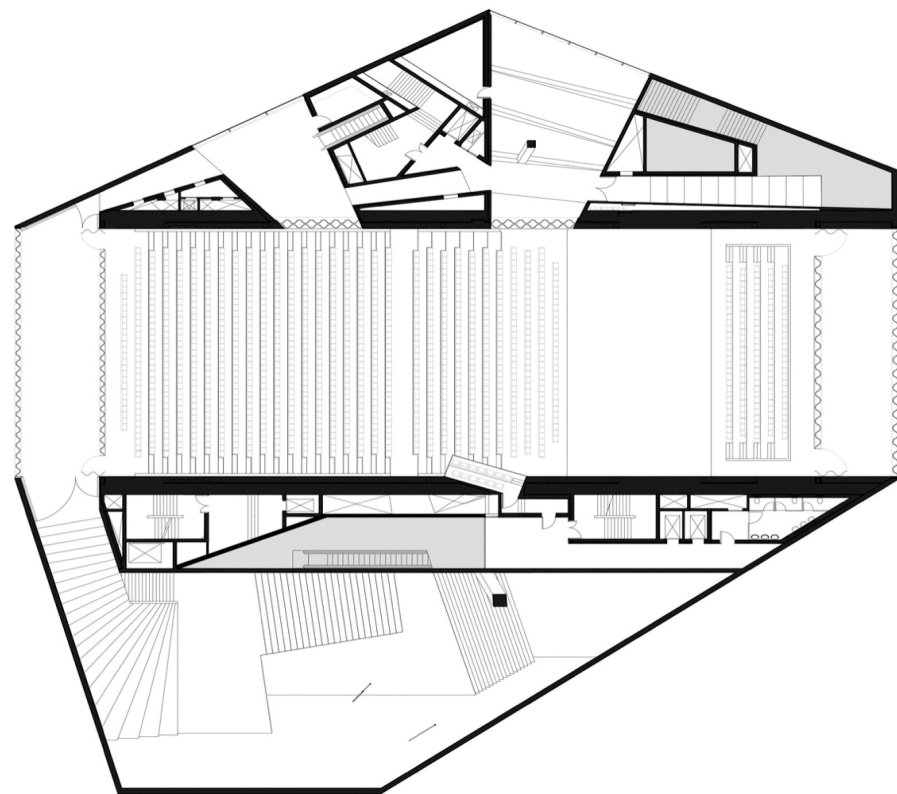
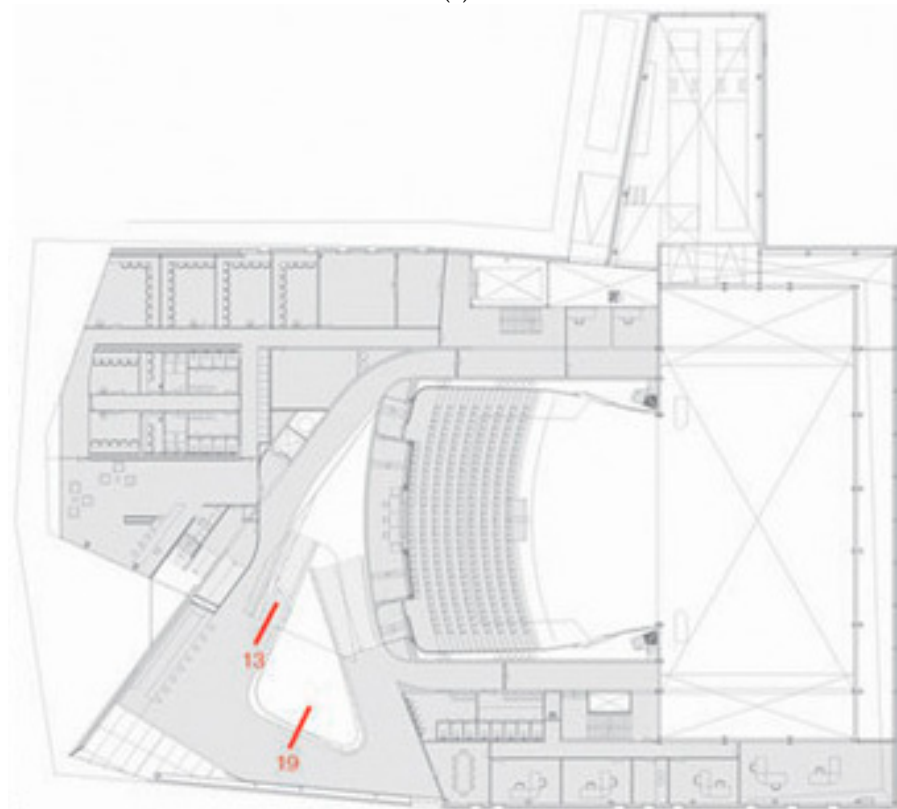


Figure 7. Agora Theatre by UNStudio. ©Christian Richters.



(a)



(b)

Figure 8. Comparison of the floor plans of both buildings (a) *Casa da Musica* ground floor plan. ©OMA. (b) *Agora Theatre* ground floor plan. ©UNStudio.

4. Conclusions

However, as a project strategy, folding was not employed until both in Architecture and Fashion Design. At the end of the 20th century, design tools and materials allowed it.

It would be erroneous to suggest that Issey Miyake was inspired by Architecture when he began his projects around the fold; rather, he inherited this approach from traditional Japanese culture. Furthermore, the Architecture analysed here does not draw on Miyake's work to experiment with folding and continuous surfaces. Nevertheless, there is a chronological and formal coincidence in the designs of Japanese and architectural culture, in which folding is employed as a design strategy in both cases. This paradigm may be structured by the fact that design tools and materials have only recently become available to enable such a strategy. It is, however, of particular interest to note that two disciplines that are ostensibly disparate, based on a seemingly simple gesture—the folding of a surface—have resulted in the emergence of a comparable theoretical corpus that is characterised by a similar emphasis on continuity and standardisation.

Miyake creates envelopes based on a single, flat surface, which, when folded regularly or irregularly, generates space. This space is capable of housing a body, protecting it, and giving it identity, yet it does not require the body to exist as an independent entity. This is a concept that is not usually associated with the typical garments and characteristics that are given to Architecture.

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Notes

- ¹ *Origami*: from Japanese *oru* = to fold and *kami* = tissue paper. Traditional Japanese technique of creating shapes and figures by folding paper. Papiroflexia: from Latin *papȳrus* = paper and *flexus* = to fold. The difference between *origami* and papiroflexia is that the former does not allow the use of adhesive or making cuts in the paper, while papiroflexia developed in the West (it was the Muslims who, in the eighth century, introduced in Europe both the paper and the art of folding it), yes. Therefore, all *origami* is papiroflexia, but not all papiroflexia can be considered *origami*.
- ² The dress is constructed from pleated fabric and decorated with Murano glass beads created by Mariano Fortuny around 1907. The garment's designation is derived from its inspiration from the Greek chiton, which was in use until the 1st century BC. Structurally, it is a basic rectangle of fabric that rests on the shoulders and falls freely, creating pleats. The Delphos was patented in 1909, and from that moment until the death of Mariano Fortuny, numerous examples were produced, with some variations, such as the length of the sleeves or the shape of the collars.
- ³ In an interview conducted by the Japanese newspaper Yomiuri in 2015, he confessed his sequels and told how he had hidden them for decades to avoid justifying his failures and being treated in a 'special' way because of it.
- ⁴ Research into this new clothing system began in 2007, and three years later, in 2010, it was launched as a branded project.
- ⁵ In theoretical physics, the fifth dimension represents an additional spatial dimension proposed as a supplement to the four conventional dimensions (three spatial and one temporal). First proposed by Kaluza-Klein theory and subsequently developed in string theories, this additional spatial dimension challenges our traditional understanding of the universe, suggesting that reality is far more complex than previously thought. This abstract concept posits the existence of a heterogeneous structure of the universe, wherein space-time bifurcations are predicated upon quantum processes.
- ⁶ Jun Mitani is a Japanese computer scientist and associate professor at the School of Information and Systems Engineering, University of Tsukuba. He is known for his work in shape modelling and computational geometry, especially in the creation of three-dimensional structures from the folding of flat materials. His research focuses on the development of mathematical methods and algorithms for generating complex shapes using *origami* techniques, which has had applications in both industrial Design and Fashion.

- ⁷ Videos on the parts unfolding process: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_u2DL3CUJsw, <https://youtu.be/4gdxhNnytSs> (accessed on 20 June 2024).
- ⁸ See (Miyake and Vreeland 1978). This book was the first monograph of a Fashion designer published in the world. In it, Miyake overturns the learning acquired through the work carried out throughout the 70s, in which he tried to unite traditional Japanese craftsmanship with new technologies.
- ⁹ Statements taken from the studio's own website: <https://www.sancho-madrideos.com/proyectos> (translated into English by the author, (accessed on 26 June 2024)).
- ¹⁰ The project represents a departure from the established methodology of designing from programmatic diagrams, wherein the form is configured to adapt to the requisite spatial parameters. Instead, an irregular and hollow polyhedron is devised, within which the rooms of the programme are introduced a posteriori.

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