

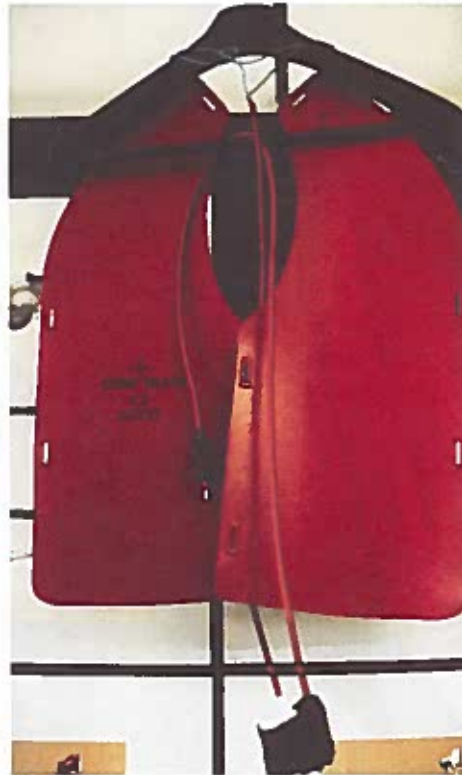
INVENTORY



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Massimo Osti: That Stendhal Thing



WILLIAM GIBSON: It seems to me as though he began so much, yet is the great Italian menswear designer least recognized by the average consumer. A huge influence, yet relatively unrecognized.

ERROLSON HUGH: You're definitely right about that. I never found out about Osti, or any of the many labels he wrought, until I moved to Germany, in my twenties. I was a design student, and a truly voracious reader of magazines. I was as aware as I could make myself in those pre-internet days. Really, I should have known.

These days though, it's hard for me to not see the influence. I'm always annoying everyone with, "That thing you think is new is actually 30 years old and was invented by this guy from Bologna that you've probably never heard of." The average consumer doesn't see it, of course, but if you've taken the red pill, the influence is inescapable.

WG: In Rome for the first time, several years ago, I initially couldn't find clothing I wanted to buy. Bling, *la bella figura*, the Pope's socks, it wasn't happening for me, but after a few days I began to recognize an inverse influence, a dissident tendency, and at the heart of it, Osti.

Bought Stone Island sneakers in a store that felt like an army surplus store. Catering to men, I imagined, for whom dressing down was a genuinely radical gesture. The unlined cotton jacket with square, unflapped patch pockets, garment-dyed, looking faded when new. I'd seen something similar in France. A refusal to play a crucial game. Rumpled. Death to shoulder pads, cuff links, loafers trimmed with bridle hardware.

EH: That dissident tendency needs a name. That's a very real, very important thing. I didn't grow up anywhere near anything that could be termed fashion, yet Osti's approach blew me away when I first encountered it. I can't imagine the waves it must have made against that kind of background. Now it's part of the fabric of things, but it couldn't have been any less radical than say, the Japanese avant-garde landing in Paris. More so, probably. An attack on the foundations.

WG: I imagine him, seeing his work today, as essentially modest. A genius, but modest with it.



When I was a child, in my small Virginia town, my favourite store was the army surplus store. It was full of history, full of design. Nothing was expensive, everything worked, did what it was intended to. It smelled of mothballs, preservative lubricants, wars. I spent hours there, pondering objects. It never made me want to join an army, be in a war. It made me want things that worked, that looked the way they did in order to do the things you wanted them to. I imagine Osti doing something similar, but then having his tremendous talent to synthesize what he found there.

EH: I like the idea of John Boyd's maxim that you can either *do something* or *be someone*. From the brief time I knew him, Osti definitely belonged to the first category. Especially when I look at his process, the tools and systems he devised and employed, it seems to me that all he really wanted to do was get on with the actual work of making things.

Michaela [Sachenbacher, Acronym's co-founder and co-CEO] and I had the incredible opportunity to work at Studio Osti in the late '90s. Over the course of a season we made multiple trips to Bologna and worked alongside Mr. Osti and his team. Although, alongside is perhaps an exaggeration, sometimes we would go for hours without running into a single other person in that sprawling studio! Occasionally though, we'd stumble upon the area Mr. Osti was working in. Always on his own. Always in quiet concentration. Scissors in hand, photocopier in close proximity, he would be there literally cutting and pasting prototypes together. Splicing up life-sized physical mock-ups of the garments he wanted to make. Using existing garments, or pieces of them, to express whatever new hybrids he had in his head. Rapid prototyping. We'd never seen anyone work that way before, and we've never seen it since. The thing about this approach is that the details and the dimensionality of the pieces were maintained. A spliced pocket would become part of a new jacket, but so would its stitching, its hardware, the way it had aged. You just can't compare that with a two-dimensional drawing.

WG: The best menswear store in Vancouver, in the '80s, carried Stone Island. I thought it was beautiful, but couldn't afford it, and, had I been able to, I wouldn't have bought it, because in Vancouver it signified a sort of sophisticated conventionality. For young stockbrokers, lawyers on the weekend. We had no casuals, so Stone Island was never street. But in 1997, or '98, I saw a black nylon coat there. Not Stone Island, I was told, but designed by Stone Island's founder. I didn't buy it, but then it haunted me. The future, I now know, was literally in it. So many aspects of where intelligent streetwear would go in the 21st century.

EH: I have the same thing. Possibly with the same collection. Again at the via Zanardi studio, upstairs in the big hall, I can still see it hanging on the racks. A season, possibly the last, of Massimo Osti Production. Michaela and I probably spent less than 20 minutes looking at those jackets and coats. In silence, trying to wrap our heads around them, that Stendhal thing going on. Seventeen years ago. We still talk about them today.

