

# VICE GARAGE

By CHLOE MALLE

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## Under Cover

As Artificial Intelligence becomes more sophisticated, living an incognito life is increasingly impossible. As faces become the new fingerprints, wearing makeup can be an act of resistance. Photographed by Cho Gi Seok. Fashion Editor: Hyunji Shi

A few days before Halloween, I was one of many New Yorkers patronizing their local CVS to buy face paint. The intended use of my face paint, however, was not to disguise myself as David Bowie's *Aladdin Sane* or Joaquin Phoenix's *Joker*—though both of these costumes would have suited my purposes as well. I was buying white and black paint to apply CV Dazzle, a camouflaging makeup technique created by the artist Adam Harvey to subvert facial-recognition technology.

CV Dazzle takes its cues, and its name, from the World War I Allied navy ships, which, counterintuitively, were painted in blinding, zig-zag geometric patterns, making it more difficult for German U-boats to determine their size and heading. Harvey took this approach and extended it to the face. The American artist discovered that by applying paint in a contrasting color to your skin tone at points where the planes of your face intersect—nose, forehead, eyes—you can effectively foil the predominant facial-identification technology, which relies on color shading and patterns to pinpoint a facial identity.



*HYE XUN WEARS DRESS BY BOSS*

Armed with my Maybelline Pitch Black lipstick and white face paint, I followed the Style Tips on Harvey's website—"obscure the nose-bridge area," for example, or "obscure one of the ocular regions"—as well as the YouTube tutorial "**How to Hide from Cameras**," by artist **Jillian Mayer**. Mayer takes viewers through the steps to apply Dazzle makeup, beginning with using masking tape to keep edges crisp and ending with a touch of glitter for pizzazz. "We all know that cameras are watching our every step," Mayer warns in the video. "The implementation of this makeup tutorial in your everyday life will be key to existing track-free."

I painted black triangles under my eyes and over the apples of my cheeks, and drew an inch-wide white stripe from my forehead down to the tip of my nose. I also pinned my hair

across my forehead in makeshift bangs, as the forehead is an important area to conceal. "It's different from the camo we might expect," Mayer tells me by phone from Omaha, where she was installing a new exhibition at the **Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts**. "It's sharp and bold, and it disorients both humans and cameras."



*Figure 1 DRESS BY MIU MIU, SHIRT BY POLO RALPH LAUREN*

This was confirmed for me when I stepped out into Midtown Manhattan at lunchtime with my face painted like a Malevich canvas. Groups of business bros in their Midtown uniforms swiveled en masse to look and chuckle amongst themselves, and a tourist mother and daughter on their way from the American Girl store moved quickly away from me in confused terror. The irony of it was that the thing that makes you invisible to Big Brother makes you hyper-visible IRL. “What I found really interesting about it,” explained Mayer of the unlikely camouflage, “is it wasn’t about hiding and it wasn’t about trying to appear as if you’re not there, but rather the opposite of that: being so boldly there that you can’t be seen.” The CV Dazzle Club, also inspired by Harvey, stages monthly Dazzle walks around different neighborhoods in

London, with members wearing CV Dazzle makeup. “Depending on where you are, people respond with concern or think it’s an amazing fashion walk,” says Georgina Rowlands, one of the group’s organizers. The group’s inaugural walk was in the King’s Cross neighborhood, to highlight the controversial new facial-identification cameras being introduced there. Its location near Central Saint Martins, however, led bystanders to eagerly ask if the group was part of a fashion shoot. Meanwhile, the following month, in Canary Wharf, security guards followed the group and pedestrians moved away nervously.





*TOP BY BOSS, JACKET BY PUSH BUTTON*

At the beginning of each walk, the Dazzle Club spends up to 40 minutes testing whether their makeup is working, using iPhones and iPads. Rowlands admits that as technology advances, it becomes more difficult to subvert it. She notes that the newer iPhones are much more likely to identify faces despite makeup. Harvey declined an interview but said by email that the updated technology and changing algorithms mean new designs are needed, something he is working on but is not ready to reveal until next year (his original version of CV Dazzle, debuted in 2010, was designed to evade only the Viola-Jones Haar Cascade algorithm, at the time the most popular program for facial detection). But for now, wearing my own Dazzle makeup, I found my iPhone homescreen could not recognize me to be unlocked, nor could my iPhotos, even though

Apple's Face ID reportedly relies on depth perception rather than contrast.

But while the makeup does seem to thwart at least some biometric-recognition software, the project isn't just about that. The goal is to make people aware of the constant surveillance we are under. As the face becomes the new fingerprint, we are forced to consider altering it for more than vanity.



*TAEMEEN WEARS SHIRTS BY DEW E DEW E*

Facial recognition is ever-evolving, from the earliest algorithms, which struggled to detect darker skin tones and often misidentified people of color (an echo of photography's original reliance on white skin as the chemical baseline), to the newer, more nuanced technologies, which are more accurate and therefore also more complicated to deceive. More governments and companies are implementing facial ID, making surveillance technology more omnipresent and wide-reaching, which means public discourse, debate, and regulations surrounding it are evolving simultaneously. While China is researching technology that uses a person's DNA to construct their facial image, San Francisco has banned the use of facial-recognition cameras, and Microsoft debuted its Ethical Guidelines for Artificial Intelligence, identifying

common principles of fairness and privacy to be adhered to.

But at the same time that governments and companies are developing their stance on the subject, citizens, artists, and designers across the globe are taking matters into their own hands, creating new ways to protect one's identity. In Hong Kong, protesters covered their faces with simple medical masks until the government banned them in October. And a variety of facial-recognition-avoidance accessories have been developed in recent years, including the Netherlands-based designer Jing-cai Liu's face projector that projects a different face onto your own from a headlamp; Sanne Weekers' Anonymous Scarf that covers the head and is printed with faces to confuse identification technology; and Reflectacles, infrared-light-absorbing sunglasses that block 3-D facial mapping and eye tracking, which are actually available for purchase. As yet, neither CV Dazzle nor these other identity-masking innovations have been implemented widely during protests or public gatherings, but as biometric-recognition technology increases in scope and use, they are sure to become more widely available and adopted.



*JACKET, SHIRT, AND NECKTIE BY PRADA*

In 2018, the **Seoul-based artist duo Shin Seung Back and Kim Yong Hun** commissioned 10 artists to each paint a portrait from the same photograph of Shin. The goal? To find the sweet spot at which Shin's face is recognizable to humans, but not to facial-recognition software. A camera with three different face-detection algorithms was installed at each artist's working table to test whether the portrait was successfully evading detection. "I'm rather curious about this new eye," says Kim of surveillance, articulating what most of the artists I spoke to expressed concern over. "I think about its nature, its relationship to human vision, its future. It will change how we see and even how we think about seeing."