

4b- Do these photos look real to you? Your answer could be cause for concern. And that's terrifying

5 In short, Bendiksen used artificial intelligence along with youtube and internet research to help him create fake people that he could insert into photos that he took in Veles, North Macedonia. It's both fascinating and terrifying to read about. But it's certainly not surprising — we've been hearing about deepfake videos, as an example, for a while now. For all we know, this has been happening with regularity. We know that Bendiksen's "Veles" is fake only because he told us. His effort proved embarrassingly effective. Many people in photojournalism swallowed his conceit —
10 hook, line and sinker. Bendiksen pulled the wool over his own colleagues' eyes, even at one of the most venerated photojournalism festivals in the world.

There have always been fakers in the news business. I know it's hard to believe, but journalists are actually just mortal beings. They have the same desires and ambitions as everyone else. And the world is full of people who let those desires and ambitions steer them into lies and
15 fakery. It's unfortunate, but true. (...) Interestingly enough, Bendiksen's "Veles" is all about the manufacturing of "fake news," which really seemed to start in earnest around the time of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. It seems this explosion of fake news was largely fueled by our incessant use of social media. Social media has been nearly indispensable to our lives over the last few years. It seems as if everything we do is tethered to it. The Internet even holds out a promise that it
20 will bring you financial spoils if you just generate enough traffic.

was this last little bit of seduction that transformed a fairly obscure town in North Macedonia into an epicenter of "fake news." That's because Veles, in the center of the country, was once prosperous, but after its industry faltered and failed, it became a place racked by poverty. " As [Bendiksen] says of Veles in the introduction to his book (which was created using AI technology, by the way) : "The largest single source of income for the town of 60,000 is from its thriving fake
25 news industry. I was surprised to find out that the fake news industry is one of the main sources of income for the people of Veles. According to the Macedonian Ministry of Economic Development, the fake news industry generated around \$2.1 billion in 2016. Fake news has a direct impact on the country's economy. (...) Abject poverty breeds a sense of helplessness. When you feel helpless, you are prone to do all kinds of things you never would have thought possible — including lie, cheat
30 and steal. It's no wonder that people have turned to churning out fake news if it can be so profitable. That's understandable. It's also terrifying to think about."

This is precisely what Bendiksen's book is doing, or trying to do. It is trying to terrify us, to wake us up. By creating a book of photojournalism that would not be questioned on its face by
35 some of the most stalwart people in the business, Bendiksen is asking a very tough and necessary question — several questions really. And he has used his own rarefied position as a highly respected and decorated person in photojournalism to make the point. I would argue that's yet another question the work brings up: Why do we give certain people a pass when it comes to believing what they do is valuable? Is it because they have won the right awards? Is it because
40 they are members of the right club or group of people? Bendiksen's book seems to make those ideas sort of laughable.

If Bendiksen can make a book that his own colleagues and some of the biggest titans in the photojournalism world will believe at face value, how secure can we feel about our ability to suss out the truth? The answer to that question has very real implications for what course life on this
45 planet will or can take. I think the scariest question this work brings up for me is whether we care? Does truth matter? (...) One thing is certain. When and if utter fakery becomes the norm, you won't be able to say the warning signs weren't there. And Bendiksen is far from the first person to raise the alarm. Americans generally agree that misinformation is a problem. (...) People are and have been talking about the perils of misinformation. I'm just a little worried that it's not enough. And
50 Bendiksen's book highlights that worry.