Week 8

After reading about deepfake technology, it is clear to me the bigger negative impact this has on society and I want to question how we should move forward with this acknowledgement. As much as deepfakes themselves spread disinformation and are not morally correct, it is more important to realize the effect they have on perceptual evidence and what it means to have video/ audio recordings in general. The author states "But I think that the most important risk is not that deepfakes will be believed, but instead that increasingly savvy information consumers will come to reflexively distrust all recordings" (Rini pg7). What this means is that in the current form of deepfake technology, it is easy to spot the mistakes and weird nature of them to conclude that the recording is not real but as technology evolves, there will be a time when they are indistinguishable from real recordings. How will we view these mediums then? What would differentiate reality from fake news?

As the author defines, perceptual evidence is direct evidence that is based on firsthand sensory experience which for a long time and today, comes through with video/audio recordings whereas testimonial evidence is indirect evidence that is based on the accounts of others. We typically prefer perceptual evidence in society as it is less susceptible to bias and interpretation. With deepfake technology, the once acclaimed perceptual evidence of audio/video recordings is slowly turning into testimonial evidence just as how the acknowledgement of photos being photoshopped was slowly put on society as well. Many negative aspects of this shift come to mind that I want to point out before talking about how we can handle this. Treating video/audio evidence as testimonial means that it would be challenging to use in court cases or other legal proceedings. It would be difficult for law enforcement to secure convictions based on video and audio evidence alone. Along with this, journalists and researchers who rely on this medium will have a limiting factor in how they report on events to uncover the truth.

The answer to how we can handle this is how we have handled similar situations. I believe that this is just another sign for society to always stay cautious. We have seen throughout history many sources of so called "perceptual evidence" become testimonials. Things like digital photos, certain news on the internet, and a more serious example, the Lindbergh Kidnapping Trial in 1935. Here, the trial for Bruno Hauptmann took place for the kidnapping and murder of Charles Lindbergh's son which relied heavily on the perceptual evidence of handwriting and ransom notes linking Hauptmann to the crime. Defence experts later had doubts about the validity of this evidence and suggested forgery of the notes. Ultimately, Hauptmann was convicted and executed based on more circumstantial evidence rather than the initial perceptual evidence. This shows that circumstantial evidence is a valid form and should be looked at with the same validity as perceptual and/or testimonial. We can also conclude for deepfakes, that it is always preferred to evaluate both sides of the story whether or not the video recording looks real, acts real, or is real. Just as how we are careful of the news we read, the photos we view, and the information we get from LLM's like ChatGPT, we must use logic and clear reasoning to come to a clear conclusion about their validity.