Twitter Thread by Mike Caulfield

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Big conspiracy theory right now is that NPR "mistakenly" published news on what conspiracy theorists believe was a planned faked invasion ahead of time. Just look at the time when this was published and look at the headline they are saying! Here's why that's idiotic.

Here's the URL to that story. Notice something about the end of it? https://t.co/KTpdsjl0Mz
sections/congress-electoral-college-tally-live-updates/ 2021/01/06/953616207/
diehard-trump-supporters-gather-in-the-nations-capital-to-protest-election-resul

The end of the URL often encodes a page's original headline. And in this case that looks like "diehard-trump-supporters-gather-in-the-nations-capital-to-protest-election-resul" not the violence piece.

Via the Wayback Machine we can get a snapshot of it from about when it was published, and yep, a different headline. https://t.co/38O7tynorf

Why is that? Well news organizations often run a story in the morning and update it throughout the day as events unfold. When events change substantially, they often change the headline as well.

But this is yet another reason relying on your own logical powers is a really bad idea. Critical thinking won't save you here, only someone that knows something about newspaper publishing or someone that has a habit of hitting the web archive will.

And it's yet another example on how conspiracy theories are not that creative. This "how did they publish it before it happened must be a conspiracy" is the oldest trope in the book, familiar to anyone who has looked at 9/11 conspiracy theorists.

Part of my recent interest in *tropes* rather than narratives is that the main tactic of these people when producing content is to know the tropes (reporting published before the event) and then just go out and look for media/events they can pair with the trope.

That's why they can create this stuff so quickly. They don't have to sit around and figure out original ways to connect events to narratives. They work from the tropes backwards.

It's also why so much of this is stunningly uncreative (same stories, again and again) but also stunningly effective (everyone knows the trope so you don't have to explain it).

Sharing the version of this false conspiracy theory here without a red line through it so that medialit people can run it as a prompt in their classrooms.

(Also note the questioning technique here in the snapshot, which is classic -- connect these dots I just gave you, and only these dots, and "come to your own conclusion")