

Searching for meaning between Logomachy
and Magic Concepts

What is “Digital Sovereignty”?

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Wikimedia Deutschland
BOB Conference, 2026-03-13

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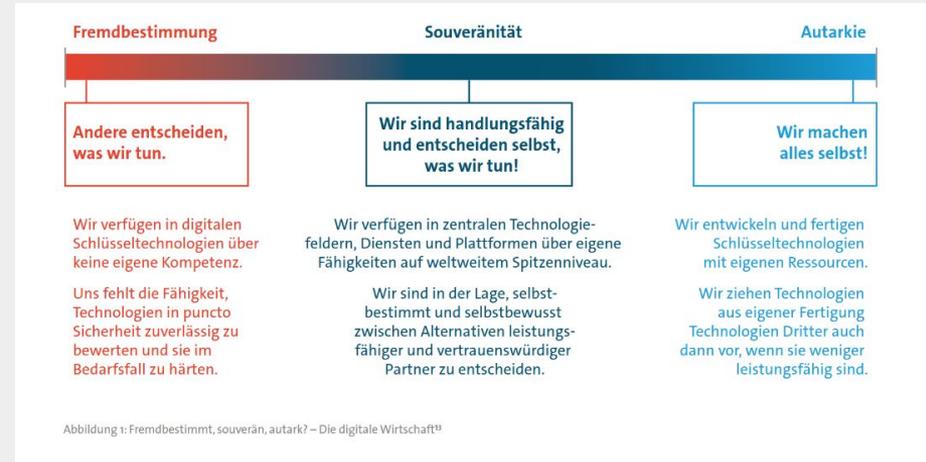


The rise of an unspecified term

Prevalence of “Digital Sovereignty” in literature:

Before 2011:	6 ×
2011–14:	51 ×
2015–18:	261 ×

Couture, Stephane, and Sophie Toupin. "What does the notion of “sovereignty” mean when referring to the digital?." *New media & society* 21.10 (2019): 2305-2322.

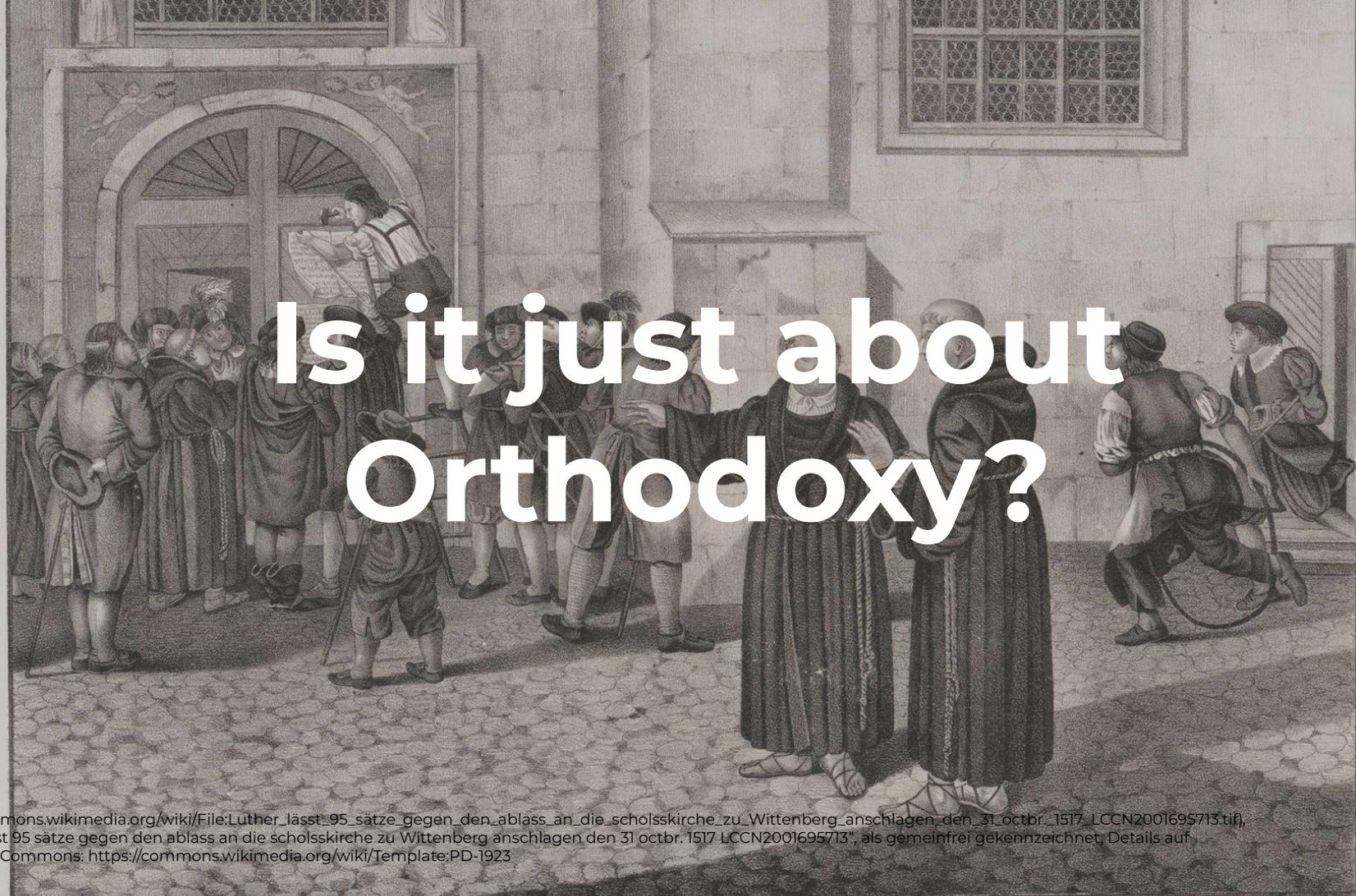


From: Rohleder, Bernhard. „Digitale Souveränität. Positionsbestimmung und erste Handlungsempfehlungen für Deutschland und Europa“ *Bitkom* (2015)



What is actually meant by “Sovereignty”?

Gerard ter Borch ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Westfaelischer_Friede_in_Muenster_\(Gerard_Terborch_1648\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Westfaelischer_Friede_in_Muenster_(Gerard_Terborch_1648).jpg)), „Westfaelischer Friede in Muenster (Gerard Terborch 1648)“, als gemeinfrei gekennzeichnet, Details auf Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Template:PD-old>



Is it just about Orthodoxy?

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A row of wooden dominoes on a wooden surface. The dominoes are arranged in a line, and several of them are in the process of falling, creating a sense of motion and cascading. The background is a warm, brownish-orange color, matching the wood of the dominoes and the surface.

**“Digital Sovereignty”
will not lead us
towards a specific
goal!**



I.) An arbitrary term and thinking in borders

Sovereignty is a bad word, not only because it has served terrible national mythologies; [...] it is often a catchword, a substitute for thinking and precision. It means many things, some essential, some insignificant; some agreed, some controversial; some that are not warranted and should not be accepted.

Five Definitions

Analysis by Couture and Toupin 2019:

- “Sovereign Cyberspace”
- Territorial approach
- Self-determination of indigenous groups
- Activist approach of social movements
- “Personal” sovereignty

Couture, Stephane, and Sophie Toupin. "What does the notion of “sovereignty” mean when referring to the digital?" *New media & society* 21.10 (2019): 2305-2322.



wat?



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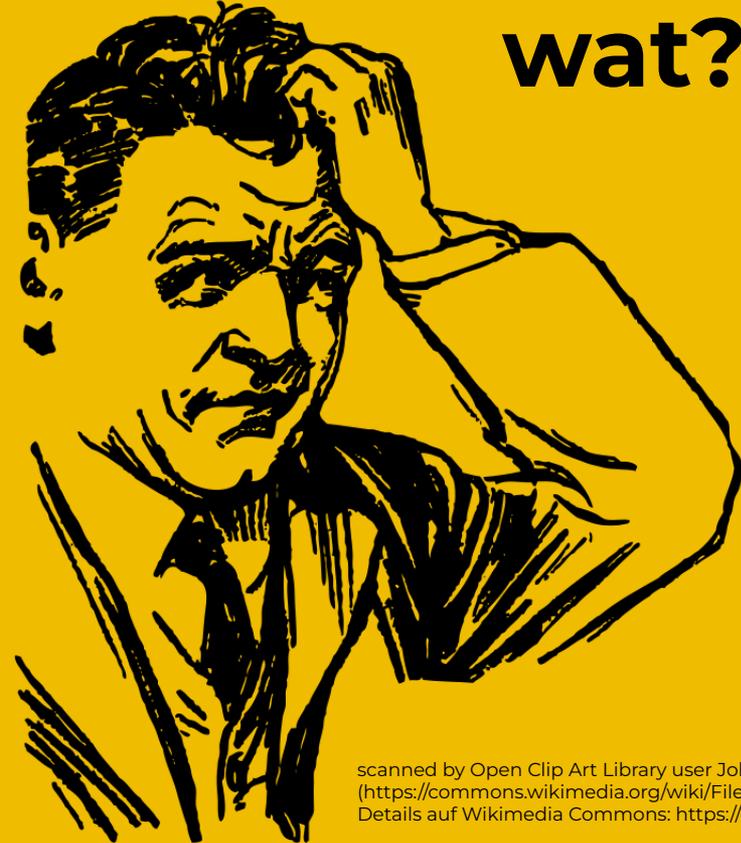


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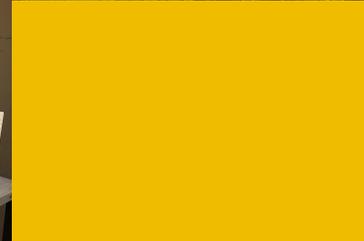
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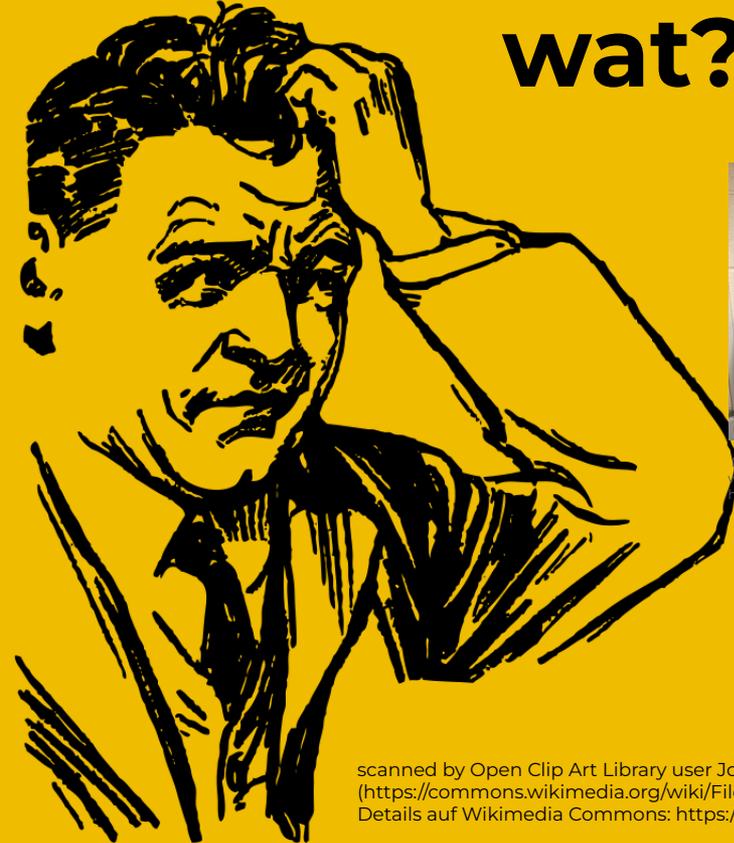


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“Take back control”?!



ChiralJon ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brexit_Banners_\(48797845046\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brexit_Banners_(48797845046).jpg)), „Brexit Banners (48797845046)“, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/legalcode>



Where is the competency?

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**Markdown and
plaintext for
the tty age!**

`</digressive rant>`



II.) Logomachy and Magic Concepts



Simon Wardley

@swardley



X : How good is the gameplay of digital sovereignty in the West?

Me : Mostly crap. We don't use maps, we use stories and have endless blah blah sessions of consultants trying to define digital sovereignty. It's like generals trying to win a war by giving it the right name.

[Post übersetzen](#)

1:06 nachm. · 22. Okt. 2020



<https://twitter.com/swardley/status/1319233778968121348>

Logomachy – the battle for theologically-correct power words – is central to the world of government and bureaucracy.

– Hood, Christopher. "Public management: The word, the movement, the science." *The Oxford handbook of public management*. (2005).

Magic Concepts

Recommended reading: Pollitt, Christopher, and Peter Hupe. "Talking about government: The role of magic concepts." *Public management review* 13.5 (2011): 641-658.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2010.532963>

Abstract

This article examines the phenomenon of 'magic' concepts – those key terms which seem to be pervasive among both academics and practitioners. Within that category our focus is on 'governance', 'accountability' and 'networks'. Our prime purpose is to map their meanings and how they are used. Following an analysis of a wide range of literature – both academic and practitioner – we find that these concepts have properties in common which help promote their popularity. A high degree of abstraction, a strongly positive normative charge, a seeming ability to dissolve previous dilemmas and binary oppositions and a mobility across domains, give them their 'magic' character. Limitations are also identified. Magic concepts are useful, but potentially seductive. They should not be stretched to purposes for which they are not fitted.

Key words

Accountability, discourse, governance, government, networks, political language, rhetoric, transparency

TALKING ABOUT GOVERNMENT

The role of magic concepts

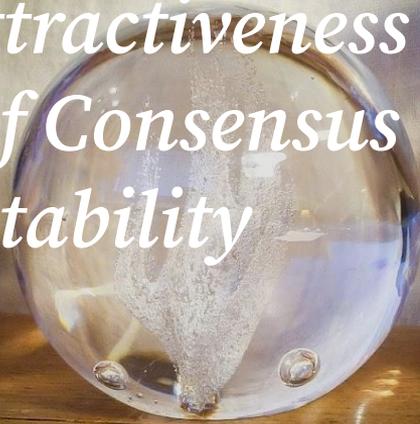
Christopher Pollitt and
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Characteristics of Magic Concepts

1. *Broadness*
2. *Normative Attractiveness*
3. *Implication of Consensus*
4. *Global marketability*





„Is the Dark Side stronger?“

(The Good Side™ will only always win in movies!)

Marnie Joyce from New York City, USA
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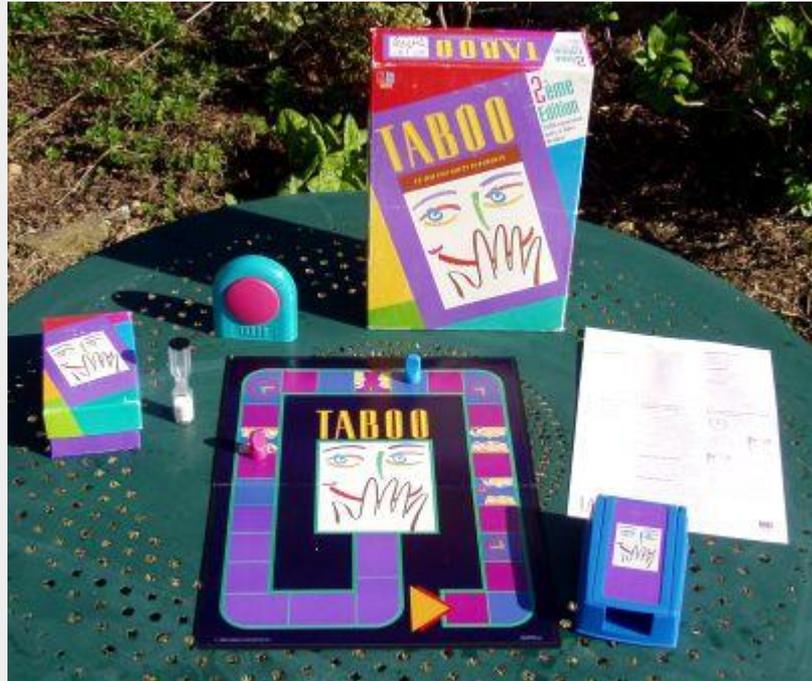
Erik Drost
([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baldwin_Wallace_Homecoming_\(48868919918\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baldwin_Wallace_Homecoming_(48868919918).jpg)),
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‘Magic’ is entertaining. It excites discussion, but when the show is over many hard choices remain“.

– Pollitt, Christopher, and Peter Hupe. "Talking about government: The role of magic concepts." *Public management review* 13.5 (2011): 641-658.

III.) Goal setting for digital competencies



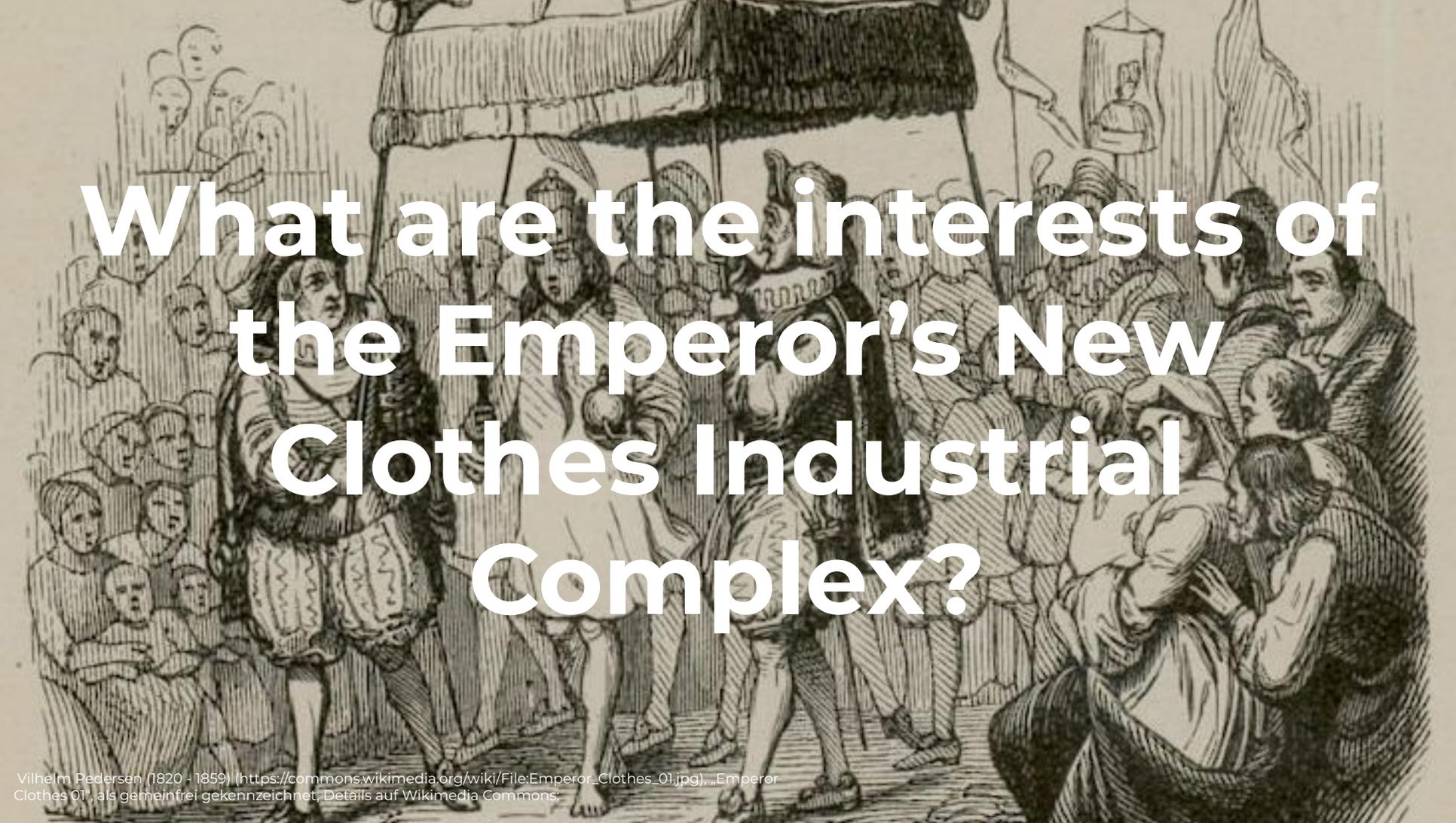


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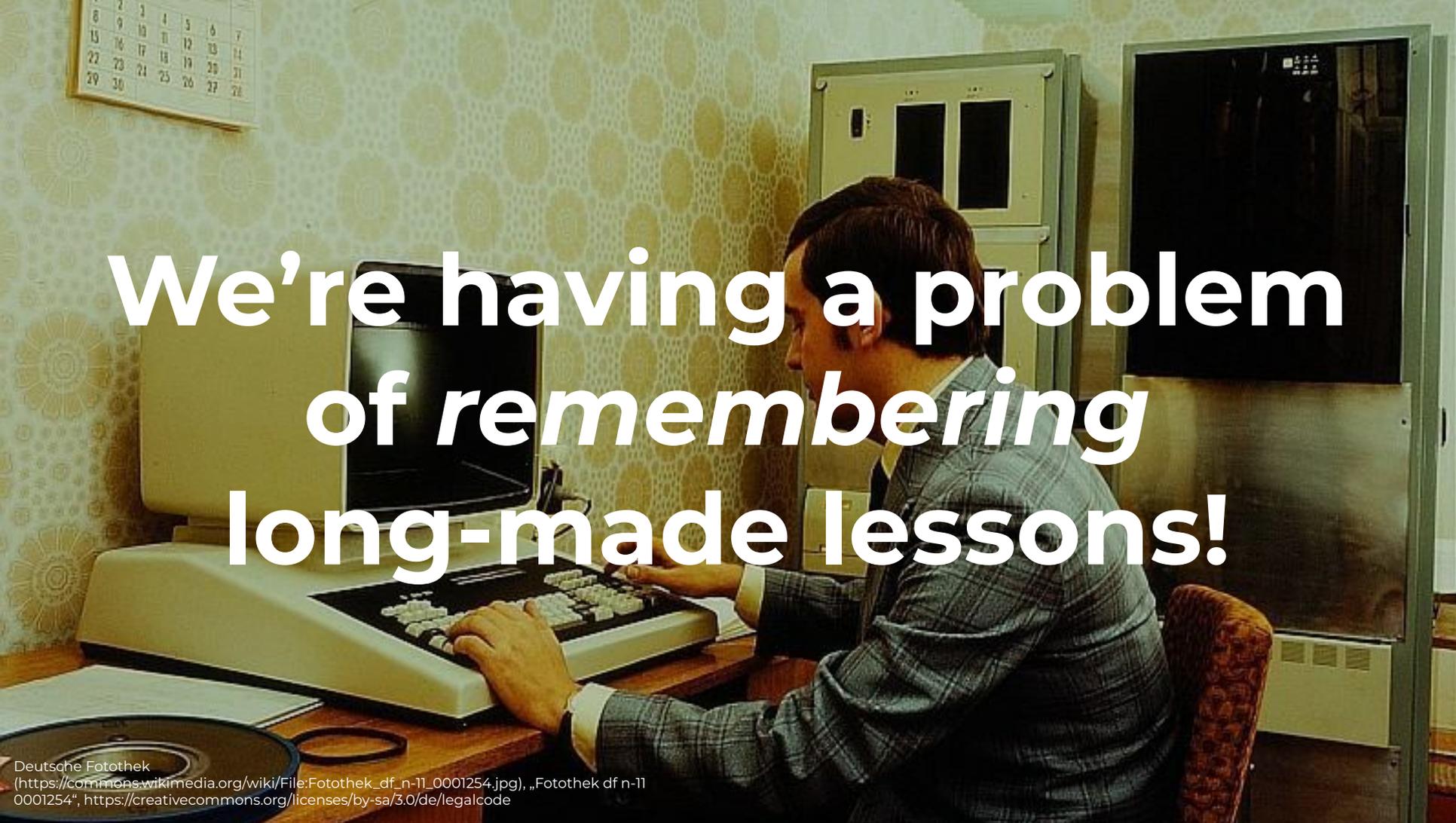
An exercise in self-discipline: DigiSouv Taboo



A worthwhile endeavour or a Folly?

A black and white woodcut illustration depicting a scene from the fairy tale 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. The central figure is the Emperor, wearing a crown and a long, patterned robe, walking towards the viewer. He is surrounded by a large crowd of people, including men, women, and children, all looking towards him with various expressions of curiosity and concern. In the background, a large, ornate canopy or tent structure is visible, and a small figure is seen hanging from a gallows on the right side. The overall style is characteristic of 19th-century book illustrations.

What are the interests of the Emperor's New Clothes Industrial Complex?



**We're having a problem
of *remembering*
long-made lessons!**



**Say what actually is.
Demand clarity.
Prioritize strategy.**



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