



► Plato's Lair by Peter Hanmer, inset Colin Davison

from the game. But what is real in this context?

The artist said that after noticing the meticulous peripheral details of Grand Theft Auto, he explored its thousands of locations to find matches for the Reggio film.

He spent about 18 months on the project, which was completed in 2017. "I hardly talked to my family. I was 100% in that world."

He said Reggio, who lives in Santa Fe, was now in his 80s and not well versed in digital technology. However, he had been intrigued by the project and said in some ways it mirrored his original intentions.

Butler said: "What's interesting about Koyaanisqatsi is that while we gravitate to this notion that this is the real world, Godfrey Reggio is adamant that it's not a documentary in the conventional sense.

"It has a narrative involving the

manipulation of images in time and space."

Arguably, therefore, the original film no more represents objective truth than the latter.

A reminder that even before the internet we were susceptible to fakery comes in Peter Hanmer's creation, Plato's Lair, inspired by a story in the Greek philosopher's Republic about prisoners in a cave whose reality is flickering shadows on the wall. The Alnwick artist first

displayed the work, featuring strange, beaked characters in a dystopian landscape, at Cheeseburn Sculpture Garden, near Stamfordham, last summer.

It was the work that won him the title Gillian Dickinson North East Young Sculptor of the Year. Here part of it is reconfigured – and retitled Plato's Lair (Redux) – in that grey hut. Peer through one of the



windows and you will see the dictator and the captives (all fashioned from plastic toy figures) in thrall to flickering images on a screen.

Plato's Republic was published in about 350BC. Despite the dire warnings about the dark age of technology, perhaps there really is nothing new under the sun.

■ **Digital Citizen – The Precarious Subject is on at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art until June 16. Admission is free and it is open daily, 10am to 6pm. The centre's website is www.baltic.art.**

Don't blame the Germans for our own shortcomings

Paul Benneworth 

I'VE been visiting Brussels this week and been witness to Theresa May's rough ride among European leaders. Although the problem is one of her own making, the UK media have seemed aggrieved that the EU members' club should be looking after its members' interests.

As Brexit's hard cliff-edge approaches, there's a sinister undertone to the commentary that's gradually becoming a deafening drumbeat. Brexiteers are desperately seeking scapegoats for their failure to plan ahead and are whipping up frenzies of elusive "hidden powers" pulling the EU strings.

One of the most egregious of these has been to frame "the Germans" as the enemy of the piece. Daniel Kawczynski MP sought out the limelight to make the ridiculous claim that Germany use European government to dominate Europe as a twisted revenge for losing World War Two.

Living close to Germany myself, I just can't relate the revenge or domination motives in my daily experiences. I have German colleagues, students, friends, and they are simply people just like us.

But what is different is that Germany is a well-ordered society where organisations are designed to fill some particular societal need. German firms' ownership is structured to prioritise long-term investments over short-term profiteering and to ensure that people can have skilful employment.

The school system is designed to produce highly-skilled workers for all jobs, and civil servants who can deliver quality public services. Governments at different levels are properly funded by taxation with money for diverse essential and desirable services to build a generous and resilient civil society.

The advantages of this order became evident recently in the European refugee crisis after 2015. Germany attracted one-third of all refugees, and this influx created a problem for the Christian Democratic government.

But Germany responded in a very well-ordered way, Chancellor Merkel famously pronouncing "Wir schaffen

das", or "we have plenty on our plate, so we can cope with that". Germany immediately began to disperse and integrate refugees, providing humane accommodation, language and culture courses.

I even saw in Heidelberg in autumn 2017 the attention to detail in their planning to help integration, witnessing a group of refugees being taught in school-teacher German how to use a pedestrian crossing. And although Merkel's been criticised extensively for it, the verdict came back recently on her well-ordered plans, and certainly it's positive.

Of the refugees who arrived after 2015, by the end of last year, one-third of them had already found a job or were in vocational training. And refugees are popular employees among small firms because they have much-needed technical skills and a strong work ethic.

Germany's strong (and well-designed) unions mean that refugee employees don't drive down wages, so that's not the reason for their popularity. It's because refugees – like all immigrants – tend to be harder working and more entrepreneurial than the population as a whole.

A well-ordered society allows everyone to thrive, achieve their potential and contribute. Germany has succeeded in peacetime because everyone is included and has a chance to succeed.

If Germany were dominating us through the Europe Union, then they would have forced us to accept more than the 110,000 refugees we took in this period. Germany is simply more successful than Britain by virtue of being better organised, and certainly doesn't need the EU to hold us back.

The truth is that Britain's problems today are caused by our own failures to plan and organise collectively, laid bare by the total failure of Brexit planning. Without facing up to that hard reality, we've no chance of finding our own place in the modern world.

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