

# From Bavaria to Disney: Modern Castles Built for Entertainment

**Max Herford**

## **Introduction**

The proposition of this article is that there is a link between King Ludwig ‘the Fairytale King’ of Bavaria and Walt Disney, the proverbial King of the Magic Kingdom—both built modern castles for the purpose of entertainment—and that this describes a new type of building. The idea of the ‘entertainment castle’ was first seen at Neuschwanstein in Bavaria in 1860 where King Ludwig planned extravagant operatic performances. Its latest expression can be seen in the 2016 structure of Disneyland Shanghai, which took the idea to a new level, matching the grandeur seen at Bavaria. Despite being commonly associated with the medieval period and the housing of the royal family and nobility, these castles are modern (modernity here being defined as the eighteenth century until today), and were constructed primarily for amusement. After describing the architectural features of each building the theoretical and cultural aspects will be considered in a discussion of what entertainment castles meant for the whimsical enterprises of Ludwig and Disney.

## **Neuschwanstein, Germany**

In 1867, King Ludwig of Bavaria had come into his fortune and was ready to build—and this extravagant program of construction ultimately led to his bankruptcy and downfall. Ludwig was inspired by his travels in Europe and his personal vision for Bavaria’s own examples of architectural opulence. Munich-based art historian Michael Petzet recorded Ludwig’s visit to the early medieval Wartburg Castle near Eisenach in Central Germany.<sup>1</sup> He wrote that the purpose of this visit was to see the setting that had been used

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Max Herford is a Master of Philosophy student at the University of Sydney. Please note that all images in this article are sourced from Wikimedia Commons.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Petzet, ‘Ludwig and the Arts’, in Wilfrid Blunt, *The Dream King: Ludwig II of Bavaria* (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 230.

by Richard Wagner in his opera *Tannhäuser*. The old *palas* at Wartburg had many original Romanesque details, in particular its round headed windows and its arcading motif to the top of most walls, which were typical of the twelfth century.<sup>2</sup> Its layout was an extended rectangle with one change of direction at the *palas* building.

Ludwig continued his trip to the castles in the Rhineland, and then visited the Chateau de Pierrefonds with the French Emperor Napoleon III. It is suggested by historian Michael Barker that Pierrefonds was probably a prime source for Neuschwanstein.<sup>3</sup> Napoleon had intended to use the castle as an official residence; it was completely reconstructed between 1855-1863, but the sight of Pierrefonds moved Ludwig because of its powerful romantic associations. Its rebuilding was under way under the direction of Eugène Viollet-Le-Duc who was involved in the restoration of castles all over France.<sup>4</sup> Ludwig was bringing a concept together in his mind: it had to do with opera and with construction.<sup>5</sup> The fine looking medieval firing galleries Ludwig saw at Pierrefonds were newly designed and built; it was in effect a modern castle created over a medieval shell.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the castle was newly rebuilt mattered less than the effect, the appearance, the setting. Ludwig was obsessed by the work of Richard Wagner and wanted to create a setting suitable for the performance of the major Wagnerian operas. However, it was not planned as a conventional theatre, it was to be a re-imagined medieval castle with special rooms for the performance of operas. A truly romantic gesture befitting of the period, when passion and impulse ruled over rationality and classical common sense.<sup>7</sup>

Ludwig outlined his building plans in a letter to composer Richard Wagner. His obsession with the idea of a castle for theatrical performance is easy to see:

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Stalley, *Early Medieval Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), pp. 199-200.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Barker, 'An Appraisal of Viollet-Le-Duc (1814-1879) and his Influence', *The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society 1850-the Present*, vol. 16 (1992), pp. 3-13.

<sup>4</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner and John Fleming, *Dictionary of Architecture* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 610.

<sup>5</sup> Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 256.

<sup>6</sup> Colin Platt, *The Medieval Castle in Medieval England and Wales* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982), p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> David Blayney Brown, *Romanticism* (London: Phaidon, 2010), p. 237.

I propose to rebuild the ancient castle ruins of (Vorder) Hohenschwangau, near the Polliat Falls in the genuine style of the old German knights' castles and I must tell you how excited I am at the idea of living there in three years' time. There will be a number of guest rooms comfortably and conveniently furnished and commanding wonderful views over the majestic Sauling, the mountains of Tyrol and the distant plain. The spot is one of the loveliest that can be found, inviolable and inaccessible, a worthy temple for the godlike friend though whom alone can flower the salvation and true blessedness of the world. There will also be reminiscences of Tannhäuser (minstrel's hall with a view of the castle beyond) and of Lohengrin (castle courtyard, outside passage way and approach to the chapel) this castle will be in every respect more beautiful and more comfortable than the lower lying Hohenschwangau which is yearly profaned by my mother's 'prose'. The outraged gods will take their revenge and sojourn with us on the steep summit, fanned by celestial breezes.<sup>8</sup>

The Neuschwanstein castle took twelve years to build on a rocky outcrop near Hinterhohenschangau. This site was extremely difficult to access, but was an elevated, spectacular location. The ground plan for the castle was entrusted to Court architect Edouard Riedl. The final design was sketched by artist Christian Jank working under Ludwig's close direction. Riedel's first plans and elevations were of a three-storey late Gothic building based on buildings seen in Nuremburg. His second design of 1868 was five storeys and the style had changed.<sup>9</sup>

By 1888, the castle was finished externally. It had eight machiolated and crenellated towers, one very tall round tower with a conical 'witches' hat' created the apex of an irregular triangle. The second most prominent tower, also round with a fighting gallery at its top, sprang from a lower square tower. This had with overscaled, probably ornamental machioliations slots.<sup>10</sup> The castle had a prominent red sandstone gatehouse with two sturdy bartizans and a crow-stepped triangular gable. The window design was distinctive: there were Romanesque biforia and triforia windows with colonettes and round heads. There were arrow-loops to most towers.<sup>11</sup> This Romanesque theme was completed by prominent stepped

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Wilfrid Blunt, *The Dream King: Ludwig II of Bavaria* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 138.

<sup>9</sup> Blunt, *The Dream King*, pp. 137-138.

<sup>10</sup> Abigail Wheatley, *The Idea of the Castle in Medieval England* (York Medieval Press: York, 2004), p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> Wheatley, *The Idea of the Castle*, p. 2.

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arcading motifs to the principal walls and to the stairways.<sup>12</sup> This was used to create overscaled, recessed and stepped arcading to the front elevation of the *palas*; this appears to be an original design motif. The whole complex was built to give the impression of an impregnable Romanesque fortress in the mountains, with a notional date of around 1200—an anachronistic aesthetic by Ludwig's day.<sup>13</sup>

The overall effect was dramatic, and it still looks extraordinary today (Figure 1).



Figure 1 – Neuschwanstein Castle.

The towers, the bartizans, the steep roofline, the dormers, and the battlements all have distinctive shapes and motifs. The repetition of these shapes though the architectural composition gives it extraordinary rhythm. The location is alpine, with snow-capped mountains and lakes, the superb setting has become part of the legend of Ludwig's castle. The effect of the

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<sup>12</sup> Blunt, *Dream King*, p. 139.

<sup>13</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture in Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Pelican 1988), p. 222.

castle set on its summit is one of soaring verticality when seen against the picturesque vistas in the middle distance. Another key to the building's aesthetic power is its "medieval massing" effect, an idea first described by Kenneth Clark, creating the illusion of overwhelming size.<sup>14</sup> All the towers and walls and gables seem to fight for prominence in the changing composition. The main *palas* (or keep) building has a large courtyard before it and a knight's building on the right side of the courtyard, this is reminiscent of the layout at Wartburg and adds to the impression of size and extent.<sup>15</sup> If the visual analysis principles set out by Rudolph Arnheim are applied to the castle it is possible to see the castle elements and motifs as exaggerated and essentialist: this is what a castle *ought* to look like.<sup>16</sup>

Ludwig only lived in the castle for a few months before his murder (or suicide) in 1886. Only seven weeks after Ludwig's death the castle was opened to the public, and the public responded in great numbers. Today, Neuschwanstein is the number one tourist destination in Germany with over 1.4 million visitors per year.<sup>17</sup> It became the original modern castle designed first for personal then used later for mass entertainment. Ludwig had envisaged opera performances for his personal enjoyment but the visitors, comparatively 'common' folk, saw an imagined world of history, pageantry, mythology and romance.<sup>18</sup>

## Disney

Reyner Banham has written about the "unique set of skills and resources for converting fantastic ideas into physical realities" found in and around Hollywood.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, the scene must now move to California in 1950 where an enterprising young movie director called Walt Disney was thinking about a new kind of park complex that would one day bear the slogan "where dreams come true". He wanted to create settings in which

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<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival* (New York: Icon Editions, 1962), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Krückmann, *The Land of Ludwig II* (Munich, Prestel 2006), p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Rudolph Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley, CA: University of California 1997), p. 117.

<sup>17</sup> Bayerische Schlösserverwaltung, 'Neuschwanstein Today', *Neuschwanstein*, <http://www.neuschwanstein.de/englisch/palace/>. Accessed 17 April, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Krückmann, *The Land of Ludwig II*, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (London: Pelican, 1984), pp. 124-125.

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his movie characters could entertain the public.<sup>20</sup> He also saw a new type of commercial opportunity, the theme park, well before any others in his industry. Robin Allen wrote that Disney instinctively understood his audience; like himself they were unsophisticated, they were naïve and yet complex and uncertain of themselves.<sup>21</sup> As visitors to his park they could escape from their daily responsibilities and enjoy themselves with their families, reliving moments from their favourite films and animations in a fantastic environment.

The buildings and models Disney had first seen at Neuschwanstein in 1935 were ideal starting points, and it was decided that the centre of the scheme would be, like Neuschwanstein, a re-imagined medieval castle.<sup>22</sup> His design team wanted some landmark for crowd flow and directional pull.<sup>23</sup> His designer Herb Ryman produced an inspired sketch which became the basis for the first castle.<sup>24</sup> When he first saw Neuschwanstein, Disney he was not interested in the fact that he was looking at a relatively modern castle barely forty-five years old. Rather, it was convincing as a great setting for a place of popular entertainment and for the momentary living out of a fantasy.

From a simple smaller version of Neuschwanstein, the castle concept as envisioned by Disney turned into something far more detailed and far larger. At the date of writing there are six Disney castles. This includes three Sleeping Beauty castles in Anaheim (opened 1955), Paris (1992), and Hong Kong (2005). As well, there are two Cinderella Castles: Tokyo opened in 1983 and Orlando in 1971. Finally, there is one Enchanted Storybook Castle, the newest and the largest of all, built in Shanghai in 2016.

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<sup>20</sup> Marc Eliot, *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1994), p. 231.

<sup>21</sup> Robin Allan, *Walt Disney and Europe* (London: John Libbey and Company, 1999), p. 163.

<sup>22</sup> Karal Ann Marling, *Designing Disney's Theme Parks* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), p. 170.

<sup>23</sup> Marling, *Designing Disney's Parks*, p. 182.

<sup>24</sup> Steve Mannheim, *Walt Disney and the Quest for Community* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 57.

***Sleeping Beauty Castle, Anaheim (1955)***

The Neuschwanstein Castle is the most famous inspiration for the Sleeping Beauty Castle at Anaheim Disneyland (Figure 2).<sup>25</sup>



Figure 2 – Sleeping Beauty Castle, Anaheim.

A concept sketch showing all the key castle design elements was produced by artist Herb Ryman in 1954 and the castle was finished in 1955.<sup>26</sup> This is a composition based on the most prominent castle-like elements seen at the Bavarian location: Rudolph Arnheim would see it as a concept formed by a collection of shapes connecting with memories.<sup>27</sup> It is not a walk-around castle: it is on plan a curved wall in a C shape connecting two buildings behind it. The castle vision was prototypical and the commercial concept was at that stage unproven. The design theme was a miniature version of Neuschwanstein and its principal elements confirm this. The finished complex has eight towers; the tallest stands to the right of the entrance. It

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<sup>25</sup> Martha Bayliss, 'Disney's Castles and the Work of the Medieval in the Magic Kingdom', in *The Disney Middle Ages: A Fairy-Tale and Fantasy Past*, eds Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> Mannheim, *Disney Quest for Community*, p. 57.

<sup>27</sup> Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, pp. 116-117.

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has a tourelle emerging through the conical cap, as does the tower at Neuschwanstein. There are seven other towers in the complex most of them with battlements, machiolation and arrow-loops. The castle wall is rustic, and is made of fiberglass reinforced gypsum painted in greys and browns to resemble craggy stonework. There is a moat in front of the main entrance. The stepped arcade motif of Neuschwanstein is seen on the rear elevation above three pointed Gothic arches. Also seen at the rear are two stubby, broad bartizan forms similar to those seen on the gatehouse in Bavaria. As the first of the Disney castles it can be now seen as a brave and cautious beginning to a most successful line of entertainment castles.

### ***Cinderella's Magic Castle, Orlando (1971)***

Magic Kingdom near Orlando has Cinderella's Magic Castle at its centre. The Kingdom is over 42 hectares square and has 19 million visitors annually. On the main axial walk-way there is a street of Victorian shop fronts called Main Street USA designed to resemble the main street at Marceline Missouri, the town of Walt Disney's childhood. The design theme is broadly American Second Empire style of around 1910, it was introduced by architect and artist Marvin Davis. These shop-fronts and reimagined civic buildings frame the front elevation of the castle, which thereby inherits a Victorian inflection.<sup>28</sup> The side and the rear views of the castle all present in a balanced and composed way. The castle is around 58 metres high but it looks far taller: it has emphasised verticality due to forced proportion. The higher floors are progressively lower in size, giving an illusion of greater height.<sup>29</sup> The rooms in the higher levels are empty and unfurnished, it is a shell for display, a Disney park landmark.

It is a circular building with paved or moat areas on all sides. The composition is irregular, not symmetrical, with one very high Gothic octagonal tower (Figure 3).

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<sup>28</sup> Karal Ann Marling, *Designing Disney's Theme Parks the Architecture of Reassurance* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> 'WDW Construction: Cinderella Castle', *Imagineering Disney*, <http://www.imagineeringdisney.com/blog/2013/9/10/wdw-construction-cinderella-castle.html>. Accessed 17 April, 2017.





Figure 3 – Cinderella's Magic Castle, Orlando.

The high tower has a smaller version of itself emerging from the balcony below the main spire, this was probably taken from Neuschwanstein. There are 27 towers of varying shapes in this building as well as many spires and pinnacles. There are four bartizans with conical witches' hat caps, and a single grand Renaissance style lucarne. The castle façade is a clever assembly of French and German inspired elements, composed in a roughly pyramidic composition. The rear displays the Gothic style with elaborate interlaced tracery using perpendicular panels with dagger and quatrefoil motifs.<sup>30</sup> The various elements amount to a gallery of historic architectural devices: spire elements with crocket ribs from Notre Dame, Chambord

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<sup>30</sup> Christopher Wilson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, (London: Thames Hudson, 1990), p. 292.

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style lucarne windows, tourelles from Bavaria and Spain, Pierrefonds style towers and turrets, with Alcazar inspired witches hat caps, spires with crockets, metal cresting with finials to roof ridges, gryphon rainwater spouts and pinnacles from Notre Dame, all scaled with great attention to best relative proportion. There is a Gothic door surround on a gable-doorway detail over the main entrance.

This castle is like a museum of mixed architectural motifs. Its influences from Neuschwanstein are there but hard to discern in this eclectic mix: the built object has moved beyond its original. The confusion of architectural style makes it difficult to assess, but to add to the layers of complexity, it could also be seen as a simulacrum as defined by Jean Baudrillard—a copy which has become detached from its sources, but has become, in its own way, more meaningful in the present context than the original.<sup>31</sup> It is a great example of informed and confident development from its precursor at Anaheim, and of Baudrillard's notion of simulacra as the hyperreal: more real than the real itself.

### ***Sleeping Beauty Castle, Hong Kong (1971)***

The Sleeping Beauty Castle built in Hong Kong in 1971 is a direct replica of the complex at Anaheim (Figure 4). There appears to be little development of the castle concept in this complex again: it is again a C shaped wall with a moat in front and all the same tropes seen at Anaheim are here in very similar proportions.

### ***Cinderella's Magic Castle, Tokyo (1983)***

This was another replica: a smaller version of the castle at Orlando (Figure 5). It was 52 metres high and all the details appear to have been reduced by, on average, 10% compared to the original. All the motifs and tropes seen at Orlando are here. The castle is roughly circular on plan and it has a moat in front of it as does the castle in Florida.

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<sup>31</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria (Ann Arbor: University Michigan, 1994), p. 6.



Figure 4 – Sleeping Beauty Castle, Hong Kong.



Figure 5 – Cinderella's Magic Castle, Tokyo.

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### ***Sleeping Beauty Castle, Paris (2005)***

There was a marked creative development at Disneyland Paris: this was no replica of anything before it. Instead we see a fantastic mix of French Second Empire style motifs applied to greatly simplified medieval forms. The castle is comparatively slender and the high tower is more prominent in relation to lower towers, it is almost as high as the Orlando castle at 51 metres. As at Anaheim, there are towers both round and octagonal, there are turrets and bartizans (Figure 6).



Figure 6 – Sleeping Beauty Castle, Paris.

Unlike Anaheim, which used grey-beige stonework colours, the towers are painted a bright pink with bright blue conical witches' hat caps. They are decorated with organic, tendril like tubework painted a brilliant white. This is hard to link to any source except possibly the Viollet-Le-Duc designs for stair railing seen at Chateau d'Eu.<sup>32</sup> As a key part of this style composition, there are two striking overscaled oval windows to the high tower and the lower square tower. This idea and the Second Empire feeling in general, may be taken from the details seen in Marvin Davis drawings for Main Street USA.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Barker, 'An Appraisal of Viollet-Le-Duc', p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Marling, *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*, p. 60.

This change of motifs is connected to Disney design director Tony Baxter's statement, "the fact that castles exist just down the road from Disneyland Paris challenged us to think twice about our design."<sup>34</sup> He saw a need to create some real difference in a city where real medieval buildings were part of the everyday background. There is very little of the Gothic detail seen at Orlando and there are reduced textural effects. The towers do not have rustic finishes suggesting stonework. They are not pretending to be medieval. There is elaborate gilt metal cresting to the ridges and rooflines to lower towers. All the towers have witches' hat conical caps with gilt finials at their point. The main towers height and slender composition induces an impressive effect of verticality. It has the Anaheim rear entrance detail of three round, not pointed arches: the centre one is the largest. It is medieval-made-modern, all the fortification references are muted and converted to pure ornament. It is slick and sophisticated, and it works because the parts achieve balance. The French location made changes to the concept necessary; the castle had to be appreciated by a large European audience. EuroDisney is located within a three hour TGV train journey of around 300 million people.

### ***Enchanted Storybook Castle, Shanghai (2016)***

The most recent building is the Shanghai castle which is the largest so far at 60 metres high. This is compared to Neuschwanstein at 65 metres. In terms of built interior space the Shanghai Building is larger having no courtyard and contemporary engineering to enable large areas between supports. It is around 3 times the size of the first Anaheim castle and more than 30% larger in terms of total mass than the Orlando castle. It includes a Royal Banquet Hall at its centre, extending the idea of entertainment to include hospitality.<sup>35</sup>

It is easy to speculate that its size and its eclectic and informed design make as powerful an architectural statement as Neuschwanstein. The massing effect seen on this castle is reminiscent of Neuschwanstein when seen from a front entrance axis. From that viewing angle it has a

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<sup>34</sup> Kevin Rafferty and Bruce Gordon, *Walt Disney Imagineering: A Behind the Dreams Look at Making the Magic Real* (New York: Disney Enterprises, 1996), p. 61.

<sup>35</sup> 'Enchanted Storybook Castle', *Shanghai Disney Resort*,

<https://www.shanghaiDisneyresort.com/en/attractions/enchanted-storybook-castle/>. Accessed 17 April, 2017.

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similar close positioning of many towers, turrets and conical caps. The eye is intrigued by the tension between these closely massed shapes that have slight variations and complex visual rhythms. This could be seen as a ‘sublime’ point of viewing. The Shanghai castle, which was intended to be in some way ‘Chinese’, has introduced a new European motif, the Baroque from Vienna and Eastern Europe. There is a tower with the ogee-onion shaped curves of German/Eastern churches. This is an innovation, as all previous castles have excluded this category of style. To an extent never before seen, it is an extraordinary full scale built museum of architectural forms (Figure 7).



Figure 7 – Enchanted Storybook Castle, Shanghai.

Figures celebrated in the mosaic decorations are a mix of classic and princesses: Tiana, Merida, Rapunzel, Elsa, Anna, Cinderella and Snow White. The theme here is not Sleeping Beauty or Cinderella but a composite offering of popular Disney fairytales, though the folk stories they originated from, many of them Western are not embedded culturally in China. The park and resort was funded by the City of Shanghai in a joint venture with the Disney Corporation. It shows that the castle concept is not static, but is evolving and it is becoming more effective as an attraction and more important as the visual hub for the entire park.

The Shanghai castle is the latest and the most effective in this evolution of the castle for entertainment. It is by far the most accurate in its rendition of historical detail because it has been assembled by a team

consisting of historians, engineers, and 3D software technicians. This has meant a new level of co-ordination between design and scheduling for fabrication. Close attention to thousands of small details has been possible and the re-use of motifs has resulted in significant economies.<sup>36</sup> As the Anaheim castle was made possible by access to Hollywood set building resources, the combination of advanced software systems with a deep manufacturing base around Shanghai has made this latest construction viable. It has created a solid and effective production model for future projects.

In this eclectic display of forms and ornamental details, the use of hierarchy in terms of size and placement has resulted in a harmonious appearance from all vantage points. The Disney design group have created a new type of building/sculpture which is confounding all contemporary preconceptions. This new/old idea of decorum with expressed hierarchy is completely opposed to the conventional modernist ethos but romanticizes medieval ideals into a fanciful new aesthetic.

### **Fantasies and Fairytales: The Meaning of Castles**

Alice Chandler, in her book *A Dream of Order*, describes the modern interest in the medieval as a channel for escape.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, escapism has been an integral facet in the castle building of King Ludwig, and of course Walt Disney's enterprise, well represented by his trademark castle logo. Ludwig's life was far from happy and he was an eccentric recluse in later life. He became obsessed with the operatic work of Richard Wagner and had every intention of staging these operas at the castle for an audience of one: himself. He was also seeing in this a diversion and an escape from the stresses of the world. Ironically, he created a place of mass entertainment and distraction at his Romantic out-of-time castle in Bavaria.

Disney had his own complex personal vision, which amounted to this: the world is full of unpleasant realities, hence people need distraction and entertainment—some way to get away from this everyday reality—and

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Smith, 'Honors for Innovative Design of Enchanted Storybook Castle at Shanghai Disneyland', *Disney Parks Blog*, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2014/09/honors-for-innovative-design-of-enchanted-storybook-castle-at-shanghai-disneyland/>. Accessed 17 April, 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska 1972), pp. 25-35.

they need to be able to take their children somewhere safe and interesting. There was a profitable and viable enterprise to be built on this simple idea of providing entertainment and distraction for everyman. The simple expression and uncomplicated packaging of these attractions was also a key to its success. Narratives and ideas had to be immediately accessible and easy to comprehend, not coded or subtle.

Robin Allan has studied Walt Disney, the Disney organisation and its values for over ten years and writes about the influence and essential goodness of these values:

Popular acceptance of Disney operates on a number of complex levels. Everyone has their own Disney in their conscious and subconscious mind and the modern child cannot escape the all-pervasive iconographic power of Disney imagery ... Aesthetic, cultural, socio-political and feminist attacks upon all aspects of Disney proliferate but the films continue to be popular, their layered richness proclaiming their classical status.<sup>38</sup>

This account of the Disney ideals is countered by Diane Ghirado writing in *Architecture after Modernism*. She accuses the company of manipulation and profiteering in its dealing with public authorities. They were shocked by the difference between the proclaimed values of the Disney characters and the hard commercial approach of the company directors. She also accuses the company of hiring star architects and publicising their names while allowing them very narrow design briefs. However, she concedes that Disney has had an effect on public architecture: it has allowed the popular and the humorous to take its place in the range symbols deployed.<sup>39</sup> Like many other architectural writers, she does not see the castles as works of particular interest, but they are nonetheless some of the most recognizable examples of modern castles, and epitomize the uplifting message that the Disney brand has built itself around.

Walt Disney himself was captivated by the wisdom and wonder of folk and fairytales. He instinctively understood that they contain a variety of themes therein that describe rites of initiation. These rites are still with us so they are acknowledged and embraced as a way to achieve meaning and personal validation. Children respond to signs and symbols as they search for direction in their journeys. Here is Carl Jung's perceptive comment on the universal power of fairytales:

Fairytales seem to be the myths of childhood and they therefore contain the mythology which children weave for themselves concerning sexual processes.

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<sup>38</sup> Allan, *Disney and Europe*, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Diane Ghirado, *Architecture After Modernism* (London Thames Hudson 1990), p. 57.



The poetry of fairytale, whose magic is felt even by the adult, rests not least upon the fact that some of the old theories are still alive in our unconscious. We experience a strange and mysterious feeling whenever a fragment of our remotest youth stirs into life again not actually reaching consciousness but merely shedding a reflection of its emotional intensity on the conscious mind.<sup>40</sup>

In European fairytales, such as those recorded by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, castles regularly occur as bastions of good.

The Cinderella story tells of competition between sisters to get attention from the prince who lives in a castle. It is about fairness and disadvantage. The honest, hardworking Cinderella wins the hand of the prince at the end. In the original Grimm version, the magic birds from the hazel tree peck out the eyes of the stepsisters so they were punished with blindness and death.<sup>41</sup> This is a story about perseverance and honesty and not accepting the constraints of injustice. The castle, where Cinderella will end up after an adolescence spent in servitude, represents a transformative place where all of your wishes can come true, the message emphasized in Disney's much loved animated rendition from 1950.

The castle plays a central role in the famous story of Sleeping Beauty as the place the princess, sent into a comatose state when she reaches adulthood by the curse of a malcontented fairy, is set to wait for the good prince to discover her and break the spell. It is a story of youth progressing to maturity and it has allusions to initiatory rites as well as the idea of virginity. There is a great deal of magic in this tale extending to the actual building which keeps its sedated inhabitants frozen in time, and protects them from outsiders with an enchanted forest of roots and thorns.<sup>42</sup> Even if negative parts of the story are set within castle walls, at the end the heroine or hero will be returned, triumphant, to a throne room in their palace. It is easy to see how the castle has developed a rich aura of mystique and imagined memories through folklore, and why this then became such a significant symbol in Disney's animated films.

A castle is the perfect setting for an idealised folk tale and his stories were based on this genre. In addition, it opens the possibility of a retreat or escape into a reimagined, exciting medieval world, to be experienced from a safe distance.<sup>43</sup> The castle and the park around it is

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<sup>40</sup> Carl Jung, *Psychological Reflections* (Routledge: London, 1979), p. 130.

<sup>41</sup> Brothers Grimm, *The Complete Fairytales* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 106.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Perrault, *The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods* (New York: McLoughlin Books, c. 1864).

<sup>43</sup> Marling, *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*, p. 182.

perceived as a safe place.<sup>44</sup> This idea of safety, the vicarious enjoyment of conflict, and the exclusion of the dangerous is central to the psychological benefit Disney sensed in the castle.<sup>45</sup> Its skyline is magic and we are all now conditioned to understand its symbolism. The fairytale king lives in the silvery-white castle with the queen. There is no industrial revolution with factories belching smoke. There is no dictatorship or proletariat. There is a clear polarity in the symbolism that is clear to all: white represents the good and (implicitly) godly—good, black is sinister and evil. This simple equation is close to everybody’s inner dream, and this is a key part of the formula for Disney’s success.

The castle is always located at the centre of Disneyland lending its romantic profile to all the other more everyday and modern buildings on Main Street.<sup>46</sup> On entertainment as the objective, Karal Ann Marling wrote: “the genuine fakery of style is entertaining and Disneyland aimed above all to entertain. It soothes and reassures the visitors too in ways the designers began to understand only after they could see the happy crowds streaming down Main Street.”<sup>47</sup> One could ask the question: is ‘genuine fakery’ for entertainment the whole idea of Disneyland?

### **A Postmodern Interpretation**

The Disney franchise lends itself to a postmodern reading on a variety of levels. Cultural theorists have repeatedly referred to Disneyland as a keystone of the hyperreal, a place where dreams surpass realities in terms of experiential and epistemological significance. Baudrillard saw in Disneyland an exemplification of the hyperreal and a simulacrum of the American Dream:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation... The Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false: it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real.<sup>48</sup>

A central part of its success and charm is premised upon delivering a creative imitation of what architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable phrases

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<sup>44</sup> Sir John Hackett quoted in R. Allen Brown (ed.) *Castles A History and Guide* (Poole: Blandford Press 1980), pp. 8-10.

<sup>45</sup> Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, p. 146.

<sup>46</sup> Marling, *Designing Disney’s Theme Parks*, p. 182.

<sup>47</sup> Marling, *Designing Disney’s Theme Parks*, p. 79.

<sup>48</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 12.

it, “romanticized history,”<sup>49</sup> perfectly expressed in the Disney castle structure that mimics an imagined medievalism like the castle it itself is based on. Umberto Eco suggested in his collection of essays published as *Travels in Hyperreality* that everybody was living in a new version of the middle ages. ‘Insecurity’ had become a key word and “the sophisticated elitist experiment coexists with the great enterprise of popularization.”<sup>50</sup> How prescient these words were—all the more relevant today when we look to the hugely popular sword and sorcery entertainment franchises like *Game of Thrones* for distraction and amusement, and the castle, a symbol of feudalism can become an aspirational beacon for today’s boys and girls.

Huxtable, rather than emphasizing the imagined history of the castles in Disneylands, notes their artificiality. Speaking of the relationship between buildings and the need for entertainment as seen at Disneyland, Huxtable draws on Baudrillard’s notion of the simulacrum:

In today’s fractured and deeply troubled society the need is for something that comforts, reassures, and entertains—a world where harsh truths can be suspended or forgotten for a benign and soothing, preferably distracting, substitute. The nostalgic simplifications of feel-good, particularly, romanticized history are the popular and profitable answer. Illusion is preferred over reality to the point where the replica is accepted as genuine and the simulacrum replaces the source. Surrogate experience and surrogate environments have become the way of life. Distinctions are no longer made, or deemed necessary, between the real and the false; the edge usually goes to the latter, as an improved version with defects corrected—accessible and user-friendly—although the resonance of history and art in the authentic artifact is conspicuously lacking...

If we take the castle as a symbol detached from any real historical associations it becomes available for appreciation as a new object or work, for instance as a public sculpture. From Orlando onwards this description could apply to Disney’s castles. At Orlando and certainly at Paris the mix of sources became so complex that it did not comply with any of the conventional rules of style appreciation, it was beyond eclecticism. But more typically, as it was seen in the context of a popular theme park, the Disney castle has not been appreciated as an original work of architectural composition, or evaluated on its own terms.

Nonetheless, as an entertainment castle alone, the Disney castle is already in a peculiarly postmodern category, transgressing and traversing

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<sup>49</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion* (New York: New Press, 1997), p. 31.

<sup>50</sup> Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (London: Picador, 1986), pp. 79-84.

style, period, and purpose. In a similar vein, Frederick Jameson commented on a new hotel in Los Angeles, “we ourselves the human subjects who happen into this new space have not kept pace with that evolution: there has been mutation in the object unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject... we do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace.”<sup>51</sup> When looking at the Disney castles, and realizing their relationship to Ludwig’s own anachronistic entertainment castles, these observations gain renewed relevance.

### **Conclusion**

The Neuschwanstein Castle was the forerunner of the castle built to entertain. It was a modern castle without any defensive function, dedicated to theatrical performance. It was seen by Walt Disney some forty-five years after it was built and the seed of an idea was planted. Twenty years later he built his own castle. His castle at Anaheim was built purely for entertainment and for crowd appeal. It was tentative and cautious in its scale and design. Not so the next castle at Orlando, Florida. It was a built museum of architectural motifs and historical styles. It was built to please visitors to Fantasyland and to act as a central focus for the park layout. It was also an original work of architectural art.

At the Enchanted Storybook Castle at Shanghai, the full promise of the entertainment castle was realised. The Shanghai composition is asymmetrical but balanced because the relative visual weights of individual parts are in harmony. The building can be seen in two ways: as a built museum or as a simulacrum. As an example of architectural history it presents a sophisticated composition of mixed historic styles, skillfully balanced and coherent. As a simulacrum it has become detached from its sources and can be appreciated as a work of public sculpture, or a built fantasy. The amount of informed architectural criticism of Disney’s castles is minimal, but an acknowledgment of its roots in Ludwig’s concept and pastiche approach goes some way in understanding their composition and their cultural and personal significance for the creators and their crowds.

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<sup>51</sup> Frederick Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 39.