

Gladiators:
modes of
engagement

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Expelliarmus!

Jean-Léon Gérôme, 'Pollice Verso' (1872)



NB: Vestal Virgins baying
for blood...

Prudentius, *Reply to Symmachus* 2.1091–1101:

Then on to the gathering in the amphitheatre passes this figure of life-giving purity and bloodless piety [the Vestal], to see bloody battles and deaths of human beings and look on with holy eyes at wounds men suffer for the price of their keep. There she sits conspicuous with the awe-inspiring trappings of her head-bands and enjoys what the trainers have produced. What a soft, gentle heart! She rises at the blows, and every time a victor stabs his victim's throat she calls him her pet; the modest virgin with a turn of her thumb bids him pierce the breast of his fallen foe so that no remnant of life shall stay lurking deep in his vitals while under a deeper thrust of the sword the fighter lies in the agony of death.

Francesco Netti, 'Gladiator Fight During Meal At Pompeii' (1880)



Virile sex appeal
or
Toxic masculinity?

**MAGNIFICENT HUMAN DRAMA OF A LOVE SO STRONG
IT SPARKED THE REVOLT THAT SHOOK THE WORLD!**



*The General
desired her...
even more than
he wanted to
possess Rome!*



Spartacus loved her!



*The Senator stole
her...and used her
for a cunning
revenge!*



*The Slaver sold
her...for a handful
of gold and betrayed
an Empire!*



*The Rebel
worshipped her...
as fiercely as his
dream of freedom!*

*Caesar used her...
in his power drive
to become ruler
of Rome!*



**KIRK DOUGLAS • LAURENCE OLIVIER • JEAN SIMMONS
CHARLES LAUGHTON • PETER USTINOV • JOHN GAVIN**

**"A MIGHTY TALE
TOLD LARGE!" -LIFE
"ABSORBING,
COMPASSIONATE!" -LOOK**

SPARTACUS

and **TONY CURTIS** as Antonius

TECHNICOLOR® SUPER TECHNIRAMA 70® LENSES BY PANAVISION

Directed by **STANLEY KUBRICK** • Screenplay by **DALTON TRUMBO** • Based on a novel by **HOWARD FAST** • Produced by **EDWARD LEWIS**
Executive Producer **KIRK DOUGLAS** • Music composed and conducted by **ALEX NORTH** • A Bryna Production • A Universal-International Release



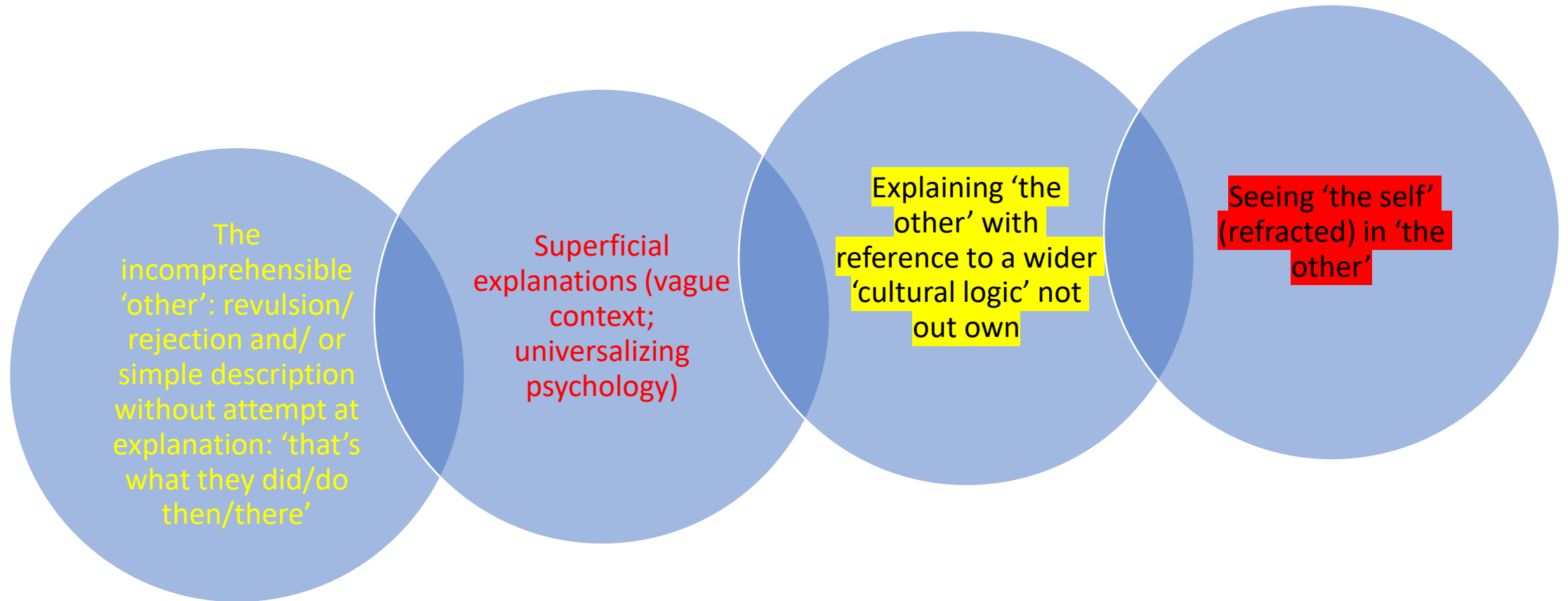


Ridley Scott, 'Gladiator' (2000)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pollice_verso



Modes of Engagement with 'the past as a foreign country'* – a spectrum of possibilities:



*'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.'
- L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953)

U. Paoli, *Rome: Its People, Life and Customs*, New York 1958, 253

‘All this horrifies us ... To say that we condemn this revolting custom is too little, we cannot even begin to understand.’

J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome*, London 1969, 308

‘No one can fail to be repelled by this aspect of callous, deep-seated sadism which pervaded Romans of all classes.’

Gladiatorial Games: North-American Fifth Edition:

Among the most popular entertainments in all parts of the Roman world were shows in which gladiators fought each other. These contests were usually held in an amphitheater. This was a large oval building, without a roof, in which rising tiers of seats surrounded an arena. Canvas awnings, supported by ropes and pulleys, were spread over part of the seating area to give shelter from the sun. The amphitheater at Pompeii was large enough to contain the whole population as well as many visitors from nearby towns. Spectators paid no admission fee, as the shows were given by wealthy individuals at their own expense.

Stephen Harrison, *Vergil Aeneid 10, with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Oxford 1991, xxi–xxii (on Virgil's battle descriptions)

'...it is the very predominance of "Iliadic" battle-description in the later books of the *Aeneid* which has constituted the principal barrier to modern appreciation. Most of the original Roman readers of the poem might have felt quite differently: **as members of a culture which practised imperialistic fighting on a world-wide scale, attended and enjoyed bloody gladiatorial shows**, put a considerable premium on military success in their political leaders, and regarded highly the description of war in literature, many of them would have appreciated the **carnage** of the battle-scenes as **connoisseurs**.'

'...the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions — everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: bread and circuses (*panem et circenses*).'

- Juvenal 10.78–81

Hazel Dodge, *Spectacle in the Roman World*,
Bristol 2011, 27:

‘In modern public perception gladiators and gladiatorial display are characteristically Roman, summing up Roman culture as militaristic, blood-thirsty, cruel and uncivilized in its attitudes towards human life. **However, such a perception ignores or misunderstands the reasons behind the extraordinary public success that gladiatorial displays came to enjoy. They not only had an important cultural function but also played a very significant public role.**’

Egon Flaig, *Ritualised Politics: Signs, Gestures, and Rule in Ancient Rome*, Göttingen 2003, 244:

‘These disgraced individuals ... displayed a behaviour governed by Roman values: discipline, fighting technique, obedience and defiance of death. This was the “semantic core” of gladiatorial games: ostracized persons and criminals staged Roman values, offered a choreography of Roman virtues. Because of this, the gladiatorial games could become a central component of Rome’s cultural imaginary, that is, become part of that culture’s set of obsessively cultivated ideas and images of fear and desire.’ (my translation)

Martial's 'Hymn to the gladiator Hermes' (5.24)

Hermes Martia saeculi voluptas,
Hermes omnibus eruditus armis,
Hermes et gladiator et magister,
Hermes turbo sui tremorque ludi,
Hermes, quem timet Helius, sed unum, 5
Hermes, cui cadit Advolans, sed uni,
Hermes vincere nec ferire doctus,
Hermes suppositicius sibi ipse,
Hermes divitiae locariorum,
Hermes cura laborque ludiarum, 10
Hermes belligera superbus hasta,
Hermes aequoreo minax tridente,
Hermes casside languida timendus,
Hermes gloria Martis universi,
Hermes omnia solus et ter unus. 15

Hermes, favorite fighter of the age; Hermes, skilled in all weaponry; Hermes, gladiator and trainer both; Hermes, tempest and tremor of his school; Hermes, who (but none other) makes Helius afraid; Hermes, before whom (but none other) Advolans falls; **Hermes, taught to win without wounding**; Hermes, himself his own substitute; Hermes, gold mine of seat-mongers; Hermes, darling and distress of gladiators' women; Hermes, proud with battling spear; Hermes, menacing with marine trident; Hermes, formidable in drooping 66 helmet; Hermes, glory of Mars universal; Hermes, all things in one and thrice unique (Loeb translation)

Painting of Gladiator types on the parapet wall of Pompeii amphitheater Overbeck-Mau 1884

