

## Giving Priority to Truth over Knowledge

*Panagiotis Katsaros*

The film *12 Angry Men*<sup>1</sup> opens with the judge's exhortation to the jurors to function as a "body of subject" that will reach a unanimous verdict on the truth. The moment of decision for a subject is when doubt ceases: questions fall silent, the unconscious closes, division abolished. To arrive there, one must pass—as the film shows—through the ordeal of doubt and the opposing versions or variations of truth.

[In *Encore*] "[...] every term for truth, has a juridical origin. A witness is asked to tell the truth [...] nothing but the truth [...] but alas, how could he?"<sup>2</sup> As Lacan notes: to say the whole truth—"there's no way, to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail."<sup>3</sup> The jurors take testimonies as givens of THE truth, overlooking that they are speech-events, subjective judgments without guarantee. Only Juror 8 questions and probes, seeking another truth beyond prejudice and established knowledge. He rejects the monopoly of truth as imaginary certainty, recalling [apropos Lacan] that *truth cannot be grasped by formally articulated knowledge*.<sup>4</sup>

Truth is not given but a process, reconstructed and reinvented in language and discourse. Juror 8 proposes a structural reading, where each element takes its place only in relation to the others, and especially to what escapes. He says to the jurors: "We owe him a few words before we decide," so that through narration they may rearticulate the accused's story—the place where truth resides.

Like an analyst, open to truth as a variable—or like Socrates, faithful to not-knowing—Juror 8 mobilizes the "body" of the jury until the fantasy of certainty collapses. The majority seeks to judge the accused's jouissance; he shifts the discussion toward the jurors' own: racism, indifference, rigid patriarchal stance.

A new truth emerges, not as an objective fact but as an invention. By questioning self-knowledge, the subject's truth comes forth. A crucial scene, Juror 3, tears up his son's photograph and collapses in front unspeakable truth, what he did not want to know. The truth as horrific, confronting his castration

As they leave, Juror 8's hesitant gaze signals the absence of certainty. Perhaps he knows that truth is never complete nor fully accessible and can only be caught if you

---

<sup>1</sup> Lumet, S. (Director). (1957). *12 Angry Men* [Film]. Orion-Nova Productions; United Artists.

Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972–1973*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, New York: Norton, 1998, pp. 91-92.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan, J., *Television*: trans. D. Hollier, R. Michaelson & A. Krauss, New York: Norton, 1990, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, ed. J.-A. Miller, transl. S. Tomaselli, London & New York, Norton ., p. 22.

throw “salt on its tail”.<sup>5</sup> It remains fragile, half-said, and must be reinvented each time anew.

---

<sup>5</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg, New York/London: Norton,, 2007, p. 55.