Selected excerpts from a provisional ‘summary’, three quarters into ‘Mass delusion’, on its ‘laws’. ¹

*Vulnerability.* We do not suffer injustice because we are underappreciated. But we are underappreciated because injustice is being done to us. Doing injustice makes a people less unloved than suffering injustice. Unassailability makes beloved, vulnerability to foreign attacks stimulates the hatred of the attackers. Because for the need of the collective soul to unburden itself, the completed act is equivalent to the planned one.

*Inflammatory propaganda.* Inflammatory propaganda belongs to the delusional hatred against a people. It accompanies and aggravates it, but is not the cause of the mass delusion. Smart people who do not yet crave the mass delusion, do not accept such a propagandistic treatment running counter to their healthy notions of rationality and morality. Typical mass delusions can neither be created nor eliminated through planned propaganda. Sudden fundamental changes in popular mood have often occurred without preparatory propaganda, or even in contradiction with previous propaganda (pp. 254-5).

*Unburdening.* The need to unburden oneself manifests itself more painfully, the refusal to be enlightened more tempestuously, depending on how blatantly and saliently the extent of an inflicted injustice is shown to a responsible community, and the more difficult it is made for it to close its eyes. The more bitterly it will hold on to the delusional wish to believe in evil, to irrationally shift blame to the victim. At the same time the delusional wish to believe in the benevolence of the hate profiteer, and the blind urge to venerate him, become more unlimited’ (p. 256).

*Hatred between peoples.* Hatred between peoples knows only one criterion. Everything the hate-subject does, is unjust and reproachable. Everything the hate-profiteer does, is just and right. It does not matter what is being done, but who does it’ (p. 258).

*Splitting of consciousness.* The state of mass delusion can be recognized from the splitting of consciousness. Connected with it is the reluctance to enlighten oneself that is otherwise exceptional. Splitting of

¹ Not quoted from the first edition, but from the second. Although this edition was even more apologetic, it was also slightly better at apodictically spelling out some of the purely psychodynamic claims of the whole concept.

But the argument is sometimes a little convoluted, so literal translation is very difficult. I have also skipped the more idiosyncratic parts focusing on Germany’s own fate around the First World War (discussed in the chapter itself), and highlighted the more universal claims - which might also apply to the semi-colonial, colonial and postcolonial conflicts in which the neutrals and allies themselves got involved (at this point in time and later).
consciousness: Man resists becoming aware of his own knowledge, his own observations and his own conclusions. But only within a partial area limited by a particular need for unburdening. While he remains fully conscious of his waking senses in other areas, and uses his common sense’. (pp. 258-9)

Knowledge and education. ‘Knowledge and education do not prevent descending into mass delusion. Warm-hearted and good-natured people experience it especially painfully – the pressure of conscience because of unfulfilled demands for humanity. Their craving for the self-deceptive means of mass delusion, for blaming the victim, therefore expresses itself particularly tempestuously and apparently crudely’ (p. 259).

Resistant to refutation. ‘A mass delusion does not simply consist of incorrect views, that one might refute. With however forceful words, one cannot prove that witches do not exist in view of a burning woodpile [Holzstösse ?]. Man caught in a mass delusion wants to believe things of whose untruth and irrationality he was (and will again be) convinced in a state of sane thinking.’ (p. 260).

Flight into consensus. ‘The mass delusion is a flight, a hiding from one’s better self, an effort to keep one’s self-respect with treacherous means. In these cases, man is not overpowered by the “mass”, that is to say the influence of the consensual feelings of the many. Instead he flees into this “mass”, into this consensual feeling, that seems to provide him with a treacherous justification. So as not to have to listen to the urgent and countervailing voice of his own reason’ (pp. 260-1).