While social conflicts undergo changes, new contradictions and forms of domination are also created. By further examining the development of recognition patterns, referring to a configuration of evaluative properties of individuals and respect for rights in the media arena, it is possible to view the dynamics of social conflicts over time. In this part of our book, my collaborators and I inquire into how the media participates in the historical process of political cultural transformation from a recognition-theoretical approach.

In Part I, I argued that mass media imagery and discourse participate in the larger field of cultural and political processes. My collaborators and I also surveyed theoretical and empirical studies that showed the manner through which the mainstream media contribute, under certain conditions, to misrepresenting people and groups and yet raising consciousness regarding injustice and rights. We attempted to show how members of disadvantaged groups emotionally and critically engage with mass media material through interpersonal conversation to make sense of their position in the social structure and in the “moral grammar of social conflicts” (Honneth, 1996).

In Part II, my collaborators and I expanded our analysis to the use of the Internet and digital technologies to show interactive processes of individual self-expression, discussion and mobilization related to struggles for recognition in online environments. In this Part, we inquire into the possibility of progressive change in the media environment as a process of reflexivity of those struggles structured in the fabric of everyday life.

My basic argument is that real struggles for recognition generate certain moral perspectives, concerning the dignity, needs, rights and social worth of people or groups, that become somewhat incorporated
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in film, TV programs, news coverage, etc. If we regard the mass media environment as a place where struggles for recognition are played out, we need to be sensitive to the possibility that changes might be, at least in part, a result of recognitional responses. I do not question that the mass media produce trivializing, ridiculing and denigrating representations. I understand that negative media stereotypes can reinforce cultural patterns, which become naturalized and influence how people feel, perceive, think and behave towards each other. In addition, I admit that media content strengthens social hierarchy and exclusion, and legitimizes policies favoring privileged groups. Still, our evaluative judgments need to be sensitive to conditions, and progressive historical change regarded as a “provisional end-state” (Honneth, 1996, p. 171) of current struggles for recognition in society. For this reason, it is important to investigate recognition struggles from a long-term perspective in the mass media environment.

This chapter is structured into three sections. First, I explain why attitudes of recognition are harder to perceive than operations of power in the media environment. Second, I explore, in media fields, different forms of accountability that focus on public and social responsibility mechanisms. I then seek to reappraise the link between mobilized publics and activism intended to change mass media content and performance from three perspectives: (i) within mass media organizations; (ii) outside media industries; and, (iii) alternative media. In the fourth section, I discuss conditions for understanding progressive changes in a mass media environment, and defend the argument that these changes should be seen as a reflexivity of struggles for recognition embedded in everyday life.

Can we expect expressions of recognition in the mass media?

I have argued in previous chapters that to investigate power relations in the mass media, it is important to pay attention to the conditions under which media professionals construct meaningful representations and discourses, on the one hand, and the interplay of these constructs, on the other, with given ideas that circulate in society about disadvantaged groups or other types of injuries. For several decades, media researchers have shown that stereotyping, denigration and exclusion abound in fiction and non-fiction media material. I contend that recognition attitudes are also present in a mass media environment. Searching for ways in which recognition responses can be accommodated and balanced