This provoking volume is one of the *Bloomsbury Social Theory and Methodology in Education Research Series*, a series which charts innovative developments in social theory research and sociology, particularly in education. The series makes a solid contribution bringing insights into theory and aspects of education; for example, education research, teacher education, sociology, politics, governance, leadership and approaches to research. The series reinforces the importance and value that the social sciences bring to our society, analysing our past and present and exploring the future.

It is in looking to the future that Thomas and Bellingham’s volume, *Post-qualitative research and innovative methodologies*, is positioned. The book is created from a keen interest to test new thinking and what
could be offered to education and the world beyond as compared to education they describe reductive, competitive and economically driven.

An enthusiasm to move outside the everyday agendas of education and the academy is demonstrated. There is a questioning as to how methodological and theoretical concerns meet and how social theory shapes research quality. The concern of the editors and authors is for democratic research and exploration of theory as a transformative force. The writing is peppered with excitement, with an eagerness to ‘glow’, to engage with vitality, energy and enthusiasm for change and for moving beyond existing framing of theory, to imaginings and new possibilities.

Post-qualitative research is not defined in concrete terms, but rather we are guided to the chapters that explore new interpretations of relations and concepts. New configurations, and defamiliarisation of concepts and methodology. There is a sense of play, of experimentation in presenting qualitative research differently, more imaginatively, with a rethinking of relating and co-responsibility.

The book addresses questions of the application of habitus, subjectivation and performativity in educational research contexts. It is structured around three concerns, subjectivity, agency and identity, time, space and materiality, and entanglements of innovation and methodology.

The editors invited both emerging and established researchers from Australia, England, Scotland, New Zealand and America, to contribute chapters that cross disciplinary boundaries to be what is described as ‘intra-disciplinary’ and ‘co-emergent’. The researcher is similarly ‘entangled’ and ‘embodied’ within the data and research.

A different lens is held up to our perceptions of research into society. Two chapters have been selected to provide examples of innovation and imaginative interpretations of qualitative research, demonstrating interpretations of post-qualitative research.

Mary Dixon’s chapter: ‘Who is in my office and which century/centuries are we in? A pedagogical encounter’ explores the learning of her doctoral students and her own learning as supervisor. She invites us into her office, decorated with a gold brocade lounge suite. It is certainly not the average academic office. The three students arrive, one after the other, and another supervisor. Black holes, in which time and space are collapsed, are used as an analytic device to explore the events through
which the pedagogical encounters are mapped. The lead actors have arrived for this exploration of learning, accompanied by the imagined presences of the researchers informing the students’ theses. We are the invited into this elegant salon, privileged to observe the learning taking part. The personal voice of the author through journal reflections, and the use of Deleuze’s (2003) black holes to interpret the learning, conceptualisation of learning as an event, combine to provide an innovative and imaginative experience of times past, present and of moving beyond the everyday, into a creative, inspirational space.

Thomas’ chapter, ‘Swarms and murmurations’, presents a case study of the connections made by teachers and students in Australian secondary schools between their professional lives, consumption of popular culture, and recognition of organisational structures in education. The methods included being filmed during a semi-structured interview particularly to note their movements, and to watch and respond to a film made by the researcher which featured cultural iconographic images. The participants’ positionalities are sought from their responses.

Critical pedagogy, through the Critical Videographic Research Method, provides an opportunity to gain insight into the relationship between the imagery in the film, and the interpretations by the individual participants. We learn of the connections the teachers make, particularly to conformity and adapting to limitations.

Thomas’ use of the swarm, framing murmuration, with methodology and method entangled, designed to produce a pattern of difference, which he describes as appropriate for ‘critical scholarship in posthuman times’.

Thomas refers to a research murmuration, a metaphoric flock of starlings, a context with changes in the patterns, fluid and emerging, and which, in its application to the analysis of the data, provides many themes and insights, including conformity and subversion.

Reading these two chapters in particular, evokes memories of walking through a gallery; starting with glowing French impressionist works from the 1880s, for example, the salons depicted by Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, people meeting over tea and discussion. This art of the period is filled with light and movement, creative, works that have moved away from the conventional, darker, more restrictive works of the previous century. The journey through the gallery arrives at the cubists,
including Picasso’s Guernica. This work takes skills developed from earlier periods, questions and challenges assumptions, and transforms concepts into fragmented, rearranged and reimagined images.

The book provides an opportunity to question assumptions upon which research and society are built. Like the impressionists and cubists, they are rejecting a representation of society as static, bound by conformity and conventions to imagine and innovate a world that glowed with light. The natural world, seen in the examples of the swarms, murmuration, and black holes, are woven into qualitative research, imaginatively interlinked with existing qualitative methodology and methods, extending them and providing an innovation, a disruption, which, it is argued, is for posthuman, post-qualitative times.

The editors and authors are to be congratulated for developing and presenting a book that takes us to see research with different eyes, to imagine new forms and terms, to be intrigued by the intersecting of humanity with the natural world, and to envisage further changes that are moving into the world of Artificial Intelligence.

Reference