Douglas Booth (University of Otago, New Zealand), 16 April 2019, “Out of the dark” - Lectures:

“A new materialism of the beach”

Abstract:

A plethora of studies analyse the beach as a socially constructed site of hedonism. These studies help us understand power relations at beaches and the long struggles over what constitutes legitimate physical activities, pleasures and representations of the body. Social constructionist approaches, however, are typically silent about the ways in which we understand and interact with the material dimensions of beaches—sand, ocean, surf, weather, climate, geomorphology, geology. Social constructionism largely conceptualises such matter as malleable for human meaning and use. In this presentation, I reconceptualise the material realities of the beach and afford them their own lives and agency. Using a case study of Bondi Beach, one of Australia’s best known playgrounds, I argue that such an approach to materialism has the potential to change the way we think about ourselves as agents and to reconsider our relationships with nature. Such thinking may also foster a new, more productive, politics of physical and cultural pursuits in environmentally vulnerable spaces.

Douglas Booth:

Douglas Booth is Emeritus Professor of Sport Studies at the University of Otago, New Zealand where he served as Dean in the School of Physical Education, Sport and Exercise Sciences between 2008 and 2017. He is the author of The Race Game (1998), Australian Beach Cultures (2001) and The Field (2005). Douglas serves on the editorial boards of Rethinking History and the Journal of Sport History and is an executive member of the Australian Society for Sport History.