The methodology of theory: Exploring the agency of statues in Hellenistic Athens through digital reconstructions

In recent years, the concept of material agency has become an increasingly popular way to understand the social relationship between humans and things. Yet, despite its growing popularity, its methodological application on archaeological materials is largely underexplored. In my paper, inspired by the theoretical line of reasoning proposed by John Robb, I argue that we can use design features as a methodological framework to investigate material agency through the use of 3D computer graphics software.

My paper is grounded in my ongoing PhD project, which investigates the role of sculpture in shaping culture and society in Hellenistic Athens by analysing the dynamics between human and material agency. In this regard, a significant challenge is the fragmentary nature of the evidence. Many of the statues that once decorated the public spaces of the ancient *polis* have not been preserved whole until today and instead, we have been left with a dispersed set of evidence: statue bases broken or whole, the statues themselves or fragments hereof, partially preserved decrees mentioning honorific statues, fragmentary temple inventories describing statues sacred to the gods, archaeological contexts occasionally disclosing where a statue supposedly once stood, and literary sources at times commenting upon a statue now lost.

By combining these different types of evidence as well as other comparative materials through the use of 3D computer graphics software, we can get an idea of what statues set up in Athens might have looked like, enhancing our understanding of the visual culture of the ancient *polis*. As such, 3D reconstructions offer a framework for discussing the agency of statues set up in the city, which, in turn, will hopefully deepen our understanding of how statues influenced the cultural and social landscape of Hellenistic Athens. To illustrate this argument, I will present a preliminary reconstruction of one case study from the Athenian Agora.