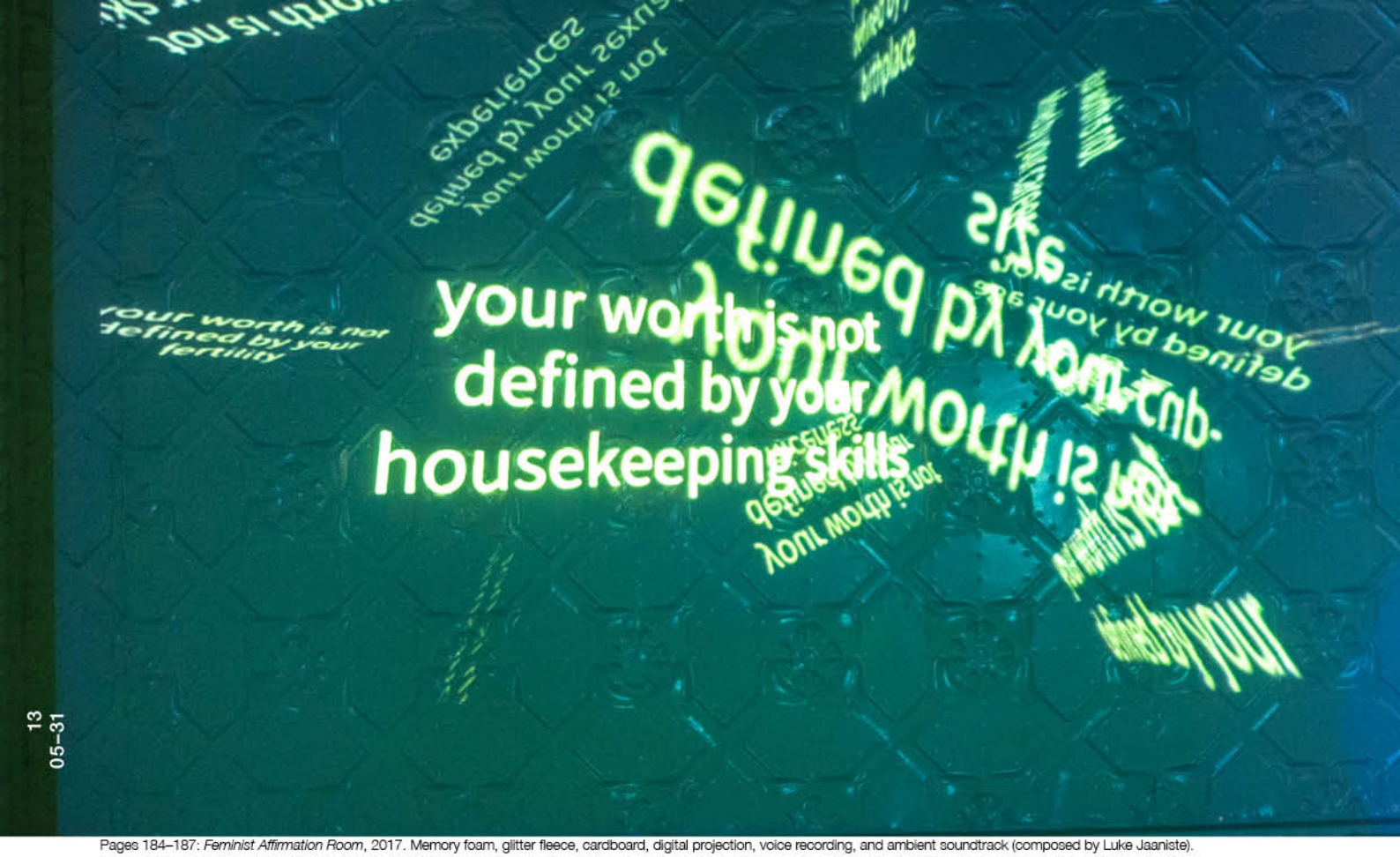
CYCLE 13

MICHELLE VINE, PIPI CUCU THEATRE,
GEMMA ELSOM, & HILARY DAVIES



Pages 184–187: *Feminist Affirmation Room*, 2017. Memory foam, glitter fleece, cardboard, digital projection, voice recording, and ambient soundtrack (composed by Luke Jaaniste).

MICHELLE VINE: I guess the project came about because I'd been doing a lot of reading of popular feminist writers own life experiences. Clementine Ford and some other U.S. writers. And through that, when you're reading the lives of other women there's something in that that forces you to reflect then upon your own experiences. I would find myself scribbling furiously in the margins of other people's stories, things from my own story, or perhaps even just: Oh yes, wow, I'm inspired by that. It might be something quite positive or affirming or it might have thrown a negative cast on perhaps a formative experience. Suddenly I'm really looking at my own life with a critical feminist viewpoint and unpacking things that have happened and perhaps the impact they're having on me today that I haven't realised.

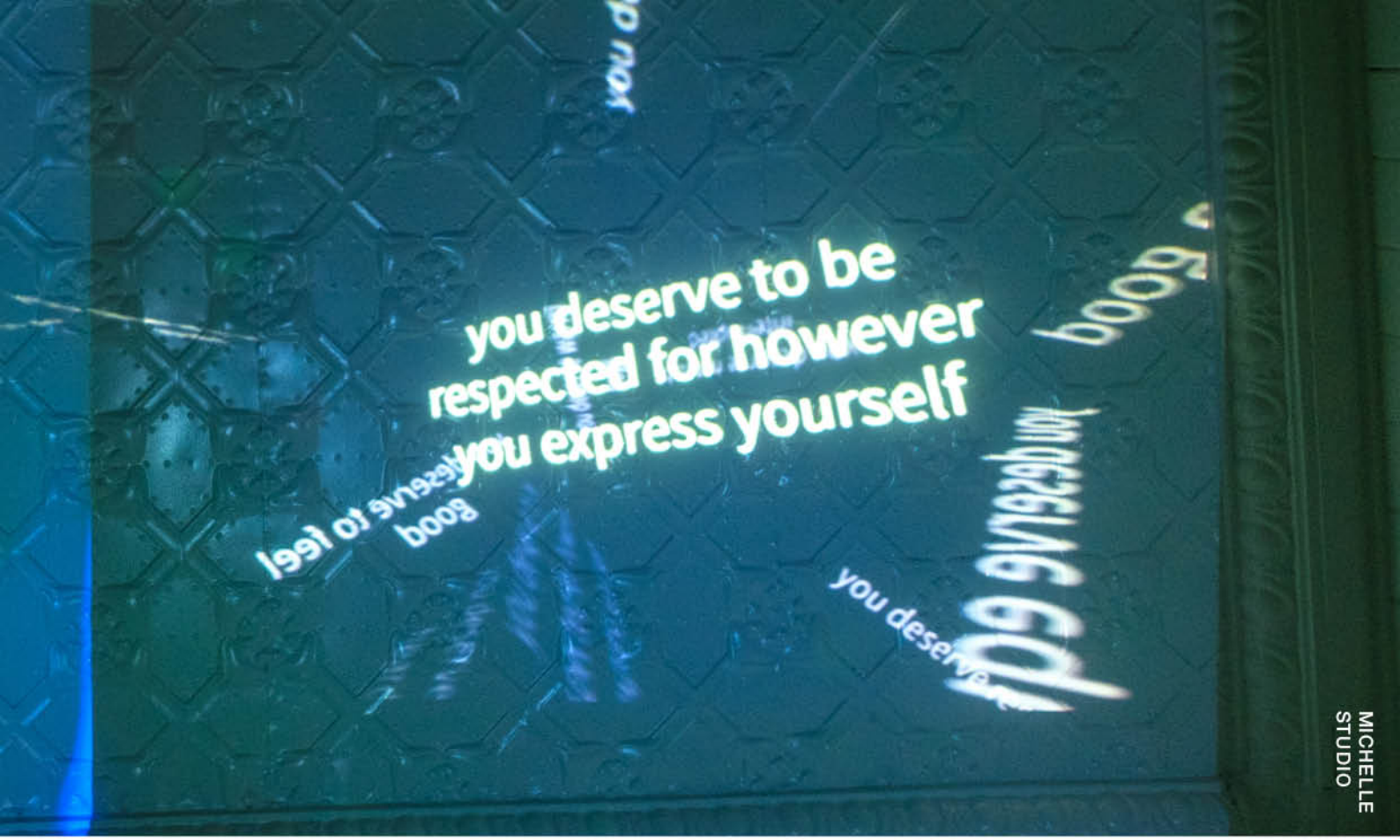
So from all these writings I had this idea: wouldn't it be great to have this space where you could take a break from all the negative influences we are commonly experiencing as women around body image and other things? It was just this idea of respite and comfort: what does it mean to—what does comfort mean, and safety? And I'd been thinking of it for a while when I saw the opportunity to apply for House Conspiracy. I thought wow, what a perfect thing, I need a room, I have an idea that requires a room.

HOUSE CONSPIRACY: Like the idea of a domestic space.

MV: The idea of a domestic space. But also a hybrid space. The creation of new territory. This is an interesting space to work in because its ostensibly an art space but it's very much a home. It's very much a domestic space and so much of the violence that women experience—we can talk about things in the media but ultimately it's within our intimate partnerships that it's played out and played out across the domestic stage. There's something poignant about that setting being a domestic space.

HC: What's it been like being in this space and reacting in it?

MV: I've really enjoyed it. Space is so critical for artists to be able to make. Being here within the space—I come into the room and suddenly it's like: right, I'm on. There's something about having access to that studio and I think of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. It's delightful to have a room of one's own and the support of the staff and the materials: I'm sure you've seen me traipse so many materials into my room. I'm in the knuckle-down creative stages. I'm working on a series of sculptures that are really tactile. I started researching the idea of a comfort object or security blanket. In psychology they talk about transitory objects. These are things children hold onto as comfort when they're not with their parents or as they're moving through different stages of development. I am just an incredibly tactile person. I love touching everything and I feel that was conditioned out of me in a way. I'm really enjoying



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playing with the idea of making big sculptures that people can come in and touch and hug and squeeze and be hugged back.

HC: You've previously used the phrase "the empathic embrace".

MV: It's a beautiful turn of phrase. What is it to embrace? What is it to be embraced? How can we do that within a space by creating spaces within spaces? And within our personal space? A lot of it is reflective of changes in my circumstances. I was married for a long time, then separated, then divorced, and totally enjoying a different phase of my life. A friend said to me, "What do you really want one day?"

And I said, "If I could just have a hugging robot that could spellcheck my theses and writings for me I'd be really, really happy. In the meantime I'm making sculptures that hug you." I haven't quite worked on the AI spellcheck functions for them yet. Maybe House Conspiracy can help me with that in ten years time.

HC: It's part of the future for better or worse. Hugging robots, I mean. But anyway—within this room you're going to project phrases on the ceiling and have spoken words as well?

MV: I'm still experimenting with the sound. I want it to have that sort of feel of... the certain intimacy of whispered sounds. There was an amazing work at Documenta. I went to both Athens and Kassel and part of this work in Kassel happned randomly on the mythological tour of Athens. There was a woman walking up the street holding this speaker. It was a whispering work. The speaker was concealed somewhere on her body but she walked with a regal procession and these whispers echoing through the cobblestoned streets in this tiny area of the city of Athens where I was. It really was quite profound to have this intimate sound in an open space. I haven't worked a lot with sound before but it's an area I'm really excited to start developing and thinking about— when you're looking at a space and creating a space and creating an embodied space— how all of the senses can be engaged and the importance of sound within that mix. I had to sort of start experimenting with sounds that might work. Maybe whispers. Maybe completely discernible as well. ⊙

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