

Nº065

Durs

Grünbein

Introduction / Einführung:
Michael Eskin

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100 Notes – 100 Thoughts / 100 Notizen – 100 Gedanken | N°065

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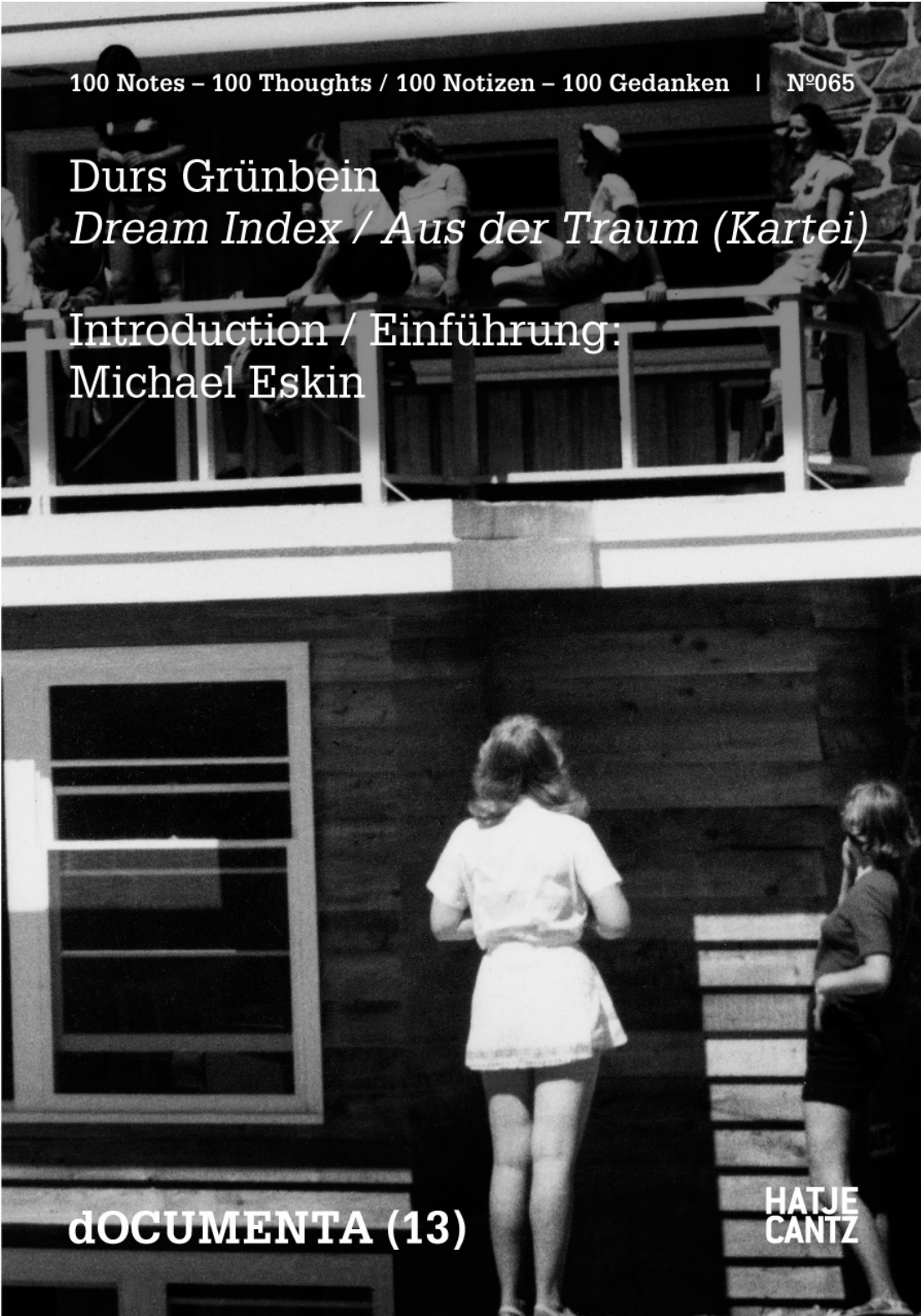
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Introduction

Michael Eskin

“Poetry puts language into a dream state, thereby reassuring itself of the impinging realities,” Durs Grünbein wrote in his seminal 2009 Frankfurt Poetry Lecture. When I first stumbled upon this somewhat cryptic statement, I took it to be more of a metaphor than something to be understood literally. Why the dream state was presumably key to reassuring ourselves of the “impinging realities” of our world, and why and in what sense poetry presumably translated language into an oneiric state, I didn’t even try fully to fathom (let alone grasp and articulate to myself), happily suffused with the line’s wafting aroma of ambiguity. After all, that’s what we tend to expect poets to do to us: draw us in and enjoin us to surrender ourselves to the magic powers of their symbols and metaphors, to the workings of what Immanuel Kant referred to as the “aesthetic idea,” which, as he explained, “gives plenty of food for thought” yet “can never be captured with adequate thoughts or concepts” or “made wholly accessible through language.”

As it turns out, however, Grünbein’s statement, so central to his poetic project and aesthetics as a whole, makes much more hands-on sense than I ever suspected, revealing itself as less of an “aesthetic idea” than a condensed expression of the very truth of his *being a poet*—his *Dichterdasein*: “All in all,” he writes in *Dream Index*, “we take reality much too seriously; while the everyday would seem to constitute the

smaller part of all that happens, not even half the truth, it's become the metric for everything. Isn't it exactly the other way around, though? Aren't dreams the creators, who allow us concretely to perceive what we experience in waking life in the first place? Reality would be unbearable without them. . . . We'd burn up at the first contact with it if we didn't have dreams—the protective gear of consciousness.” More specifically, what dreams do, Grünbein suggests, is open up a space in which we are no longer subject to the “law of causality,” in which we learn to “distrust all necessity” and “despise the iron rule of the status quo.” Thus, in order to *reassure* ourselves of the “impinging realities,” we first need to *make sure* that we survive them intact. Enter dreams: as the purveyors of freedom, dreams, it turns out, are assigned a signal *existential* and *ethical* role in Grünbein's universe. Which also means that language that has been “put into a dream state” becomes the vehicle of freedom, an essential means of calibrating our strivings with the conditions of their unfolding. And that is precisely what the poet does, according to Grünbein: in freeing language from the strictures of necessity (read: the straitjacket of quotidian speech), he creates spaces of articulation in which the waking individual is given freedoms he did not hitherto possess. Dreams “endow existence with poetic density”—accordingly, it's Grünbein's “sole purpose in the everyday to recapture poetry,” which is to say, literally, the freedom of speech, or freedom *tout court*.

Grünbein's *Dream Index* allows us unprecedented access not only to his own poetics and psyche but to the deep strata and sociocultural ramifications of the creative process more generally. This, then, is what artists do for us: create freedom. But—didn't we know this already? Didn't