Domino's Philosophy of Luck: A Bataillean Reading*

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Marvel Comics' Neena Thurman, a.k.a. Domino, is unique among the mutants in the X-Universe for her supernatural ability to bring about personal good fortune. This good luck, however, cannot be willed into existence. Instead, she must throw herself into dangerous, life-threatening scenarios and trust that the odds will turn in her favour.

Gail Simone (writer), David Baldeón (artist), Michael Shelfer (artist), and Jesus Aburtov's (colour artist) *Domino* (2018-19) takes the titular character's supernatural power as a central theme. Within the two volumes (*Volume 1: Killer Instinct*, issues #1-6, and *Volume 2: Soldier of Fortune*, Annual #1 and issues #7-10, respectively), Domino reflects on fortuity and death and, through my intervention here, develops philosophical themes that echo the tenets of Existentialism, particularly in the works of French philosopher Georges Bataille. I am not the first scholar and comics fan to suggest that the X-Universe and Existentialism go hand-in-hand (Housel 85-98; Kavaldo 35-49; Samuelson 105-114; Thompson 299-310), but my aim is not to demonstrate how Domino exhibits the traits of a Bataillean heroine.[1] Instead, I propose a comparative approach that combines the story of the fictional character and arguments by the twentieth-century philosopher so that we can engage with core ontological and ethical questions. For Earl Miner, "[c]omparison is feasible when presumptively or formally identical topics, conditions, or elements are identified. Of course what is presumptively but not actually identical soon betrays difference. With tact and luck, however, we may find the difference just great enough to provide interest, and the presumed identity strong enough to keep the comparison just" (qtd. in Brown 72). In short, I will argue that Domino is an Existentialist hero who practices a philosophy of luck by experimenting with her relationship to the world, selfhood, and

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others. Regarding the latter, when good luck favours her, expending energies gloriously in battle produces intense friendships and happiness for Domino.

The following article provides interpretive remarks about *Domino* and its latent philosophical stakes while also refining Bataille's onto-ethical theory, i.e., there is no ethical theory without ontological inquiry. By unraveling Domino's mutant abilities alongside her reflections about chance, life, and mortality, *Domino* poses questions that are central to onto-ethical inquiry, each of which I tackle in separate sections: does the universe give a damn about our existence and, if it does not, what are the forces that we must contend with to exercise our (perhaps limited) free will? What makes a unique being, what factors contribute to personal identity and, if a small piece is taken away, is that person still the identical person they were before? And how do others help us determine who we are and how we collectively inhabit the world?

"Come Play Domino": Gail Simone, David Baldeón, Michael Shelfer, and Jesus Aburtov's *Domino* (2018-19)[2]

Before answering these questions, it would be helpful to know how Simone et al. depict the character and her powers, as well as the story arcs of the two published volumes.[3] First, Domino's pale skin and black marking around her left eye are unmistakable, setting her apart aesthetically from the other mutants in the X-Universe. Domino is cheeky, intelligent, brave, a good friend, and a strong leader. She aspires to live up to these traits; thus, her struggles, personal and external, are additional efforts to maintain those virtues. Simone et al.'s *Domino* also provides the character with a detailed backstory and a set of all-female teammates, both of which are discussed in detail later in the article.[4]

Harnessing the power of good luck and managing her good luck power is a key theme in Simone et al.'s *Domino* series. Chance and luck are unpredictable; thus, Domino's power produces unpredictable consequences. Domino relies on good fortune in life-threatening situations, but exactly how the universe will benefit her—or prevent her from losing her life—is as surprising for the character as it is entertaining for readers. As an introductory example of this power in the first issue, Domino's battle with some minor gun-wielding baddies almost kills her. Her near-death experience is due not to the villains' proficiency with weapons, but to a runaway 18-wheeler truck. As the truck speeds towards Neena, in voiceover, she reflects on her good luck power and its humiliating results. Once her powers kick in, "I'll survive," she says, "but with a broken **arm.** [Or] I'll land on a mattress but get a **skull** fracture" (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 1*).[5] In this minor skirmish, Domino sprints from the pursuing truck then stumbles face-first into the mud. Baldeón and Aburtov render this humili-

ating, life-saving accident with clear details. In one panel they draw and colour the dirty brown viscosity of the mud as Neena face-plants into it, and, in the next panel, Neena passes unharmed underneath the blurred truck (see Figure 1). Domino sighs with relief, "Sometimes my power is a real &#%$ [...] Son of a bitch. Mud right down the **cleavage**" (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 1*). The loss of this good luck power will be a devastating blow to Neena as the first arc of the series unfolds.

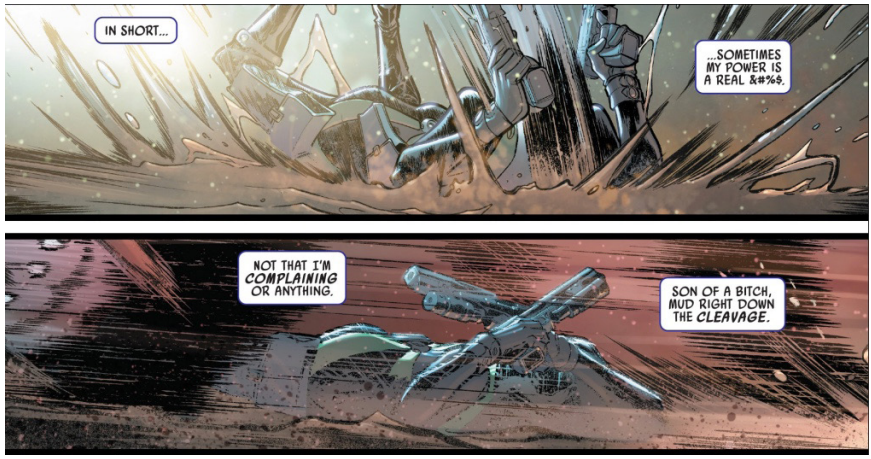

Figure 1. *Domino* #1, in *Domino, Vol. 1: Killer Instinct*, by Gail Simone, David Baldeón, Michael Shelfer, and Jesus Aburtov. ©Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2018.

In the first arc of Simone et al.'s run, Neena takes her good luck power for granted, which sets up a tragic story as she loses those powers at the hands of antagonists Desmond and Topaz. After she gains mastery over her abilities with the assistance of Kung-Fu Master Shang-Chi, Neena teams up with Rachel Leighton, a.k.a. Diamondback, and Inez Temple, a.k.a. Outlaw, to help defeat the villains by the end of issue #6. In #7, Wakandan royal Shoon'kwa first tasks the team to find and collaborate with the vampire Morbius to destroy a growing legion of vampires who want to take over the world. Following the completion of the mission, Shoon'kwa then tasks the trio with kidnapping Longshot, another mutant with powers that allow him to control the odds (*Marvel Comics Encyclopedia* 192) and who is perhaps a threat to the safety of the planet. Domino discovers that he is under the control of the evil Mojo and frees him from the villain's grip, thereby preventing the (future) annihilation of the human race and putting an end to the second arc. The new team of heroes form Hotshots and continue their adventures in that five-issue series, *Domino: Hotshots* (2019).[6]

"I'm on a Hot Streak for One Moment": The General Movement of Energy

Between the specific plot events of the two *Domino* volumes, the character reflects on her powers and tries to sway the odds such that she and her teammates come out ahead. Alongside Neena's reflections on fortuity, mortality, and the ordering of the universe, Bataille can help us to articulate a philosophy of good fortune. The essential feature of his philosophy is articulating what he calls a general economy. Bataille contrasts economics that posits a limited amount of available energy, resources, and wealth against a foundation of abundance and the necessity of its unproductive expenditure. For Bataille, however, dispensing with these excess energies is an immense risk. Giving away all our energy or wealth may mean we receive nothing in return and we may not have energy and wealth for tomorrow. We may perish from all this gift-giving of energy or wealth, but if good luck favours us, the odds will be on our side and we will somehow recuperate our strength to live another day. I take Bataille's theory of the general economy alongside Domino's adventures and interpret his call for "a reversal of thinking [in ethics and economics]" (Bataille, *The Accursed Share* 25).

In *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volume 1: Consumption*, Bataille introduces the study of general economics, an attempt to elucidate the general movement of energy, "the exuberance of living matter as a whole" (39).[7] General economics looks at the excesses of resources and what the individual and society at large can make of its surpluses of energy (labour, population) and wealth (currency, goods). Conversely, restricted economics is a theory about the deficiency of resources, wealth, and energy, the common foundation for studying economic systems. General economics seems a more accurate account of how both individuals and society operate. After a system has put enough energy and wealth to productive use for the maintenance of life and growth, the surplus must be spent unproductively. However, the useless expenditure of surpluses is not only difficult but can easily go awry, such as in the mid-twentieth-century nuclear bomb crisis. In Bataille's reductive and naive view, the exceedingly rich US had two choices post-World War II: donate its excess wealth to the rehabilitation of European infrastructure and society, or use that excess to continue to develop more nuclear arms that would likely lead to massive destruction of life, an expenditure on an apocalyptic scale. In the system Bataille describes, excess energy and wealth, then, are the defining problems for the study of economics. This surplus is aptly named the accursed share. Now, this accursed share can either be spent gloriously or catastrophically, as in the case of the US's postwar wealth. A catastrophic expenditure signifies the unwilling and uncontrolled release of pressure (the building up of energies). When one tries to make productive use of surplus energy and wealth, the result is often misfortune: "if we do not have the force to destroy the surplus energy ourselves, it cannot be used, and, like an unbroken animal

that cannot be trained, it is this energy that destroys us; it is we who pay the price of inevitable explosion" (24). Instead of this explosion, Bataille advises the practice of glorious risk-taking, e.g., at the national level, providing funds to other nations' infrastructures, and at the individual level, acts as simple as lending a helping hand, donating to charities, or expending energies in all-night consensual sexual exploits. Given this summary of his theory, any reasonable historian, economist, or politician would refute or reject Bataille's advice for social and political organization. This said, I value Bataille's theory as an alternative to dominant frameworks of ethical thinking (deontological and utilitarian), for he enables a comparative analysis with *Domino* as the eponymous character flirts with glorious recklessness in every issue.

Bataille insists that impetuousness should be our ethical guide to glorious expenditure. In backpacking across Europe, spontaneously relocating to some faraway place, giving away all our wealth, or taking a stranger home after a night out, we are stripped of our identities, left alone to make our way in a new city or topography, without financial and physical security. Squandering energies puts trust in chance as we have minimal control over the consequences of our recklessness. We may perish, or feel close to death, in and through these unproductive expenditures and gift-giving, yet we hope we live to see the next moment. Alternatively, we may hold a view that the universe will shield us from any harm so long as we take few risks —shut in as we shut out the world and its inhabitants, we store our physical energies and financial resources, stuffing our metaphorical and literal house full of surpluses that will, if we do not spend them ourselves, find a means of escape such as a house fire, burglary, financial crash, or pandemic. Hiding all these finances or refusing to expend our energies also shelters us from communicating with others. For Bataille as well as for Domino, expending gloriously in battle and with gift-giving helps secure a person with friendships and happiness. The aim of the following account of Domino's philosophy of luck is to thus posit an onto-ethical system that promotes intimate communication, community, and joy.

"A River of Probability": Domino's Mutant Powers and the Indifferent Universe

Squandering excess energies and resources as well as testing of one's faith in Fortuna are essential themes in Domino's story. As a child, Neena was born under the conditions of Project Armageddon, a US government research experiment that sought to create the perfect weapons. At Halcyon Electives, where these experiments took place, Neena's mutant powers began to emerge around the age of ten. A flashback in *Domino* #3, coloured in black, white, and grey, with white borders as opposed to black borders in other pages of the series, shows how the experimenters forced Neena to consciously manipulate her luck. Like many other evil scientists, these experimenters encourage Neena to use her powers by threatening others, in this case, her kitten

Christmas. However, what the experimenters do not know is that her powers do not have an accessible on-and-off switch. In this scenario, after Christmas is threatened, one experimenter accidentally tases the other evil scientist after an allergic reaction to the feline. Here Neena learns that she cannot willfully bring about good fortune; she merely has an influence on or shifts the odds in her favour when the situation demands it. She turns to metaphor to better understand this power, calling it "a river of probability" that she can dam and reroute to suit her needs (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 1*).

Damming and rerouting chance means that other unfortunate souls will experience bad luck. For Simone's version of the origin story, Domino's powers are inversely proportioned to the antagonist of the first arc, Desmond. Young Desmond was also part of Project Armageddon; however, he has an affective link with Neena such that with her good fortune, he suffers in exchange. As a flashback reveals—in black, white, and grey again, plus red, as if from a warning or danger light, and black frames—

when Neena saves her kitten, Desmond's right arm mysteriously snaps in at least three places, the break accompanied by the appropriate sound effects, "SNAAPP CRAAKKKK KRKCC," and Desmond's screams of pain (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 1*). It is here that the lead doctor, Dr. Rossini, states his belief that by torturing Desmond, Neena's powers will increase. Throughout the years, then, Desmond grows into a crippled old age as a result of Neena's good luck, although Desmond is roughly the same age as Neena. When we encounter him in issue #1, Baldeón draws him as an old man with a walker, hunched, grey-haired, and nearly blind. He appears, unannounced, to taunt Domino after taking away her powers with the help of his accomplice Topaz whose mutant ability allows her to temporality suspend the special abilities of other mutants. Desmond maliciously states to Domino, "I can **reverse** the process, do you see? Every **calamity** that befalls you… **I get back a little bit of the life that you took from me**" (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 1*).

A flashback to Halcyon reveals how Desmond and Topaz began their pursuit of Domino. Desmond and Topaz were both at Halcyon in their youth but under different contexts. Topaz is the daughter of Dr. Rossini and she takes a shine to the thin, fragile Desmond. The fragile boy and the doctor's daughter become friends and, as they grow up together, lovers. When they reunite with Domino in adulthood, then, Desmond chips away at Domino's luck until he transforms from his old age into a youthful, muscular man. The light returns to his eyes and his hair returns to its blond colour from his earlier life. Since Domino has not yet recovered her abilities, her teammates Diamondback and Outlaw battle Desmond towards the close of the arc. After Diamondback is gravely injured by Desmond, Outlaw—whose power is superstrength—delivers him a deadly blow.

Desmond is a perfect adversary for Domino and for raising the philosophical stakes; the story of Neena and Desmond, and their respective exchanges of good and bad luck, parallels how it functions outside of comics as well. To draw from Bataille, in the case of competitive games, gamblers throw away large sums, yet their reckless

expenditures enable gambling as the jackpot or prize is sought after through betting—with more betting comes a larger prize, often at many individuals' financial ruin: "[T]his circulation can be considered to be a real *charge* of the passions unleashed by competition, and that, among a large number of betters, it leads to losses disproportionate to their means" (Bataille, *Visions of Excess* 170); Bataille observes of his own life, "'Money burns a hole in my pocket' when I gamble" (*On Nietzsche* 86). With expenditures such as gambling, with hopes of winning the biggest sum, the accursed share is squandered by way of risk-taking, i.e., every bet is a risk of one's wealth. With the relationship between the inversely proportioned luck of Domino and Desmond, good fortune may line the pockets of one gambler (Neena) while another turns out his pockets in search of one last coin, one last chance to win it all back but in doing so, further damages to himself (Desmond). To be precise, each bet Neena places when in a dangerous situation—sprinting from a runaway truck, as issue #1 depicted, and assuming some good luck will spare her from being crushed—is a losing bet for Desmond. Domino is rewarded for her risk-taking while Desmond facilitates that reward through his suffering. A philosophy of luck suggests that good luck for one is bad luck for another.

Although it is always advantageous for Domino to trust that her power will get her out of a sticky situation, she nevertheless takes a leap of faith each time. At a glance, perhaps Domino's philosophy is close to the stoicism of Zeno of Citium: the universe is a series of random occurrences that we have no control over, "but within our control is our rational state of mind to deal with whatever may come our way" (Bonello Rutter Giappone and Turner 41). However, Domino's approach in this chaotic universe is to embrace the irrationality of putting all one's chips on a single number in roulette, except with her mutant ability, she dams and reroutes the odds in her favour. For Bataille, the kind of pure expenditure exhibited by Domino is closer to mysticism than stoicism as it demands a self-consciousness that lacks something as its object, dispensing with rationality altogether (*The Accursed Share* 189-190, 197n). Allan Stoekl clarifies this point, suggesting self-consciousness is a reluctance to accept things or goods that serve a purpose or provide one with a sense of security or profit that can be put to use for some future goal or contented mental state (265-68). Domino cannot see the outcome of her actions in advance, and therefore, like the mystic, enters a state of readiness to accept what the universe provides her. The effects of her power are thus unpredictable as chance finds a way to save her skin. In #7, outmatched by a legion of undead, Domino demands that Diamondback "Blast the **trees.**" Her teammate hesitates but Domino reassures her that she is lucky. In three panels, Baldeón and Aburtov show the trees splintering into shards and dispatching the undead as Domino huddles in the middle of the explosion (see Figure 2). She emerges from the blast and declares, "Son of a bitch. It worked" (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 2*). As with the example from issue #1, the art of *Domino* requires panels that detail minuscule changes in time to thus document Neena's close brushes with death. Importantly for the philosophy of luck, even with the odds in her favour,

Domino maintains a sense of surprise and an affectation of joy.

Figure 2. *Domino* #7, in *Domino, Vol. 2: Soldier of Fortune*, by Gail Simone, David Baldeón, Michael Shelfer, and Jesus Aburtov. ©Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2019.

A Bataillean ethics demands that we risk ourselves, undergo and bring about violence and violations, and, by spending our surplus energies and wealth, there is little to do but "break into infinite laughter" (*On Nietzsche* 28, 36). This laughter is a result of anguish at one's mortality and, again like the mystic, the acknowledgement of the utter indifference of the universe when it comes to individual existence. Domino's anguish reveals itself in her comical dialogue and snappy one-liners. When she encounters Morbius in issue #8, she allows herself to be bitten so he can drink her blood and regain his strength. What is noteworthy here is that Neena volunteers to give her blood so that her friends are not harmed, but I will say more on this later. She quips, "I'm not gonna get infected right? I'm pale enough **already**" (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 2*). Baldeón then draws her pulling aside her outfit to reveal her neck, her face expressing a kind of melodramatic swoon. I read this gesture as both a humorous performance and a performance of anguish that then leads to more laughter. She quips again after she survives the bite, "You [Morbius] **sure** I'm not going to go all Hammer Films on everyone?" Domino's laughter and self-sacrifice contrast with

the actions of her fellow mercenary, frequent teammate, and collaborator Deadpool. He also participates in a form of mysticism through his excessive sacrificial offerings (i.e., killing the bad guys). Bataille argues that blood sacrifices, both literal and figurative, send the victim and the executioner into states of ecstasy (Thompson 303-09). While Deadpool is often the instigator of violence and reaches his ecstatic state through excessive violence, Domino, to the contrary, puts all her faith in the universe to carry out its inconceivable and even improbable exercises in impartially taking some lives while sparing others. Domino does not sacrifice others to become a mystic but offers herself as a possible victim, which, as her mutant ability allows, thereby benefits her with further life and laughter. Laughter at the ethically-neutral universe, then, is another facet of the philosophy of luck.

"Life Is a Gamble and I'm Counting the Cards": Laughing at Death, Shedding the Ego

The effects of Domino's good fortune are often humorous and bring the reader laughter as the character narrowly escapes her ruin, often by literal inches. An exemplary case is Domino and Diamondback's first meeting with Outlaw at a bar in a desert town in *Annual* #1. The three characters engage in a scuffle and Outlaw throws a knife at Neena's head. At the precise moment, Baldeón and Aburtov provide a panel with Domino raising a pint glass to her lips, deflecting the knife and thereby cutting the jukebox's power cord, sending the bar's patrons into an angry frenzy (see Figure 3). Outlaw, Diamondback, and Domino then best the barflies and become friends. Watching Domino escape such life-threatening situations parallels our enjoyment of early comedy films by Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, whether the former's roller-skate scene in *Modern Times* (1936) or the latter's falling house scene in *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928). Siegfried Kracauer observes that film comedies, such as those with these two stars, "minimized [the performer's acrobatic] accomplishments in a constant effort to present successful rescues as the outcome of sheer chance [….] Accidents were the very soul of slapstick" (301). Chaplin, Keaton, and Domino all have good luck on their side as they dodge physical injury and death and we discover something about existence through our chuckles and chortles at their near misfortunes: "laughter is attached to the fact that we rejoice in something that puts the equilibrium of life in danger" because each of our lives, whether we acknowledge it or not, hangs by a thread. In simple terms, "We laugh […] because we are dead, because we are, laughing, ourselves the dead man" (Bataille, *Unfinished System* 144). One glide too many may send us over a precipice, one step to the left may result in a horrendous crushing, and a sated mouth may produce a knife in the eye.

Figure 3. *Domino Annual* #1, in *Domino, Vol. 2: Soldier of Fortune*, by Gail Simone, David Baldeón, Michael Shelfer, and Jesus Aburtov. ©Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2019.

Laughing at these brushes with death is not indicative of the courage to face it. Despite the power to affect probability in her favour, Domino fears death as much as non-mutants. Even with the knowledge that she will come out of a situation with her life intact, Domino puts on a brave front while in danger because she is aware of her fragile and contingent life, and understands that the transition from existence to non-existence can be an unexpected and quick one. In #10, on Planet Orphan, "deep in the Mojoverse," Domino and her team know not what life-threatening villainy awaits, yet they push forward, with jet-packs no less, to find medical help for Longshot. In voiceover narration, Domino reflects on the strangeness of being "on an alien world, Maybe dying. To do something good, something **clean.** If this is the end, we could do **worse.** On the other hand, […] we're not dead **yet**" (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 2*). It is this fear of the unknown, followed by the eventual surpassing of fear, that pushes the boundaries of existence. Baldeon's centre panel, just before the above narration, is an extreme close-up of Neena's face: she flies into danger with a smirk. For Bataille's onto-ethics, to have this fear is to reach the pinnacles of existence as it comes closest to the universal truths of mortality and chance: "To risk is to touch life's limit, go as far as you can, live on the edge of gaping nothingness!" (*On Nietzsche* 86).

Standing at the edge of this gaping nothingness, laughing into and at the abyss, is itself a form of thinking (Bataille, *Unfinished System* 90). Laughter is a reflection upon and overcoming of the anguish of existence and the fortuity of coming into being as this entity called "me." The influence of Existentialism, following Jean-Paul Sartre's oft-cited dictum of "existence precedes essence" (qtd. in Housel 86), is evident in Bataille's theory, notably in this rich passage:

> If I envisage my coming into the world—linked to the birth then to the union of a man and a woman, and even, at the moment of their union … a single chance decided the possibility of this *self* which I am: in the end, the mad improbability of the sole being without whom, *for me*, nothing would be, becomes evident. Were there the smallest difference in the continuity of which I am the end point: instead of *me* eager to be me, there would be with respect to *me* only nothingness, as if I were dead. (*Inner Experience* 69, ellipses and emphasis in original)

Bataille suggests here that personal identity is the result of unpredictable, indefinable, uncontrollable, and unmotivated events that are, for all intents and purposes, indifferent to the fleshy mass I identify as me, my ego, my soul, whatever we wish to call it. For our mercenary, Domino is Domino at the microscopic level. As her origin story details, the biology of her mutant abilities is miraculous. Instead of someone with good luck, she could have been born as a mutant with different strengths and weaknesses (or even born a human). In the first issue of the series, Domino realizes that her identity has been largely dependent upon chance when Desmond and Topaz turn off her power and fling her out her high-rise apartment's window. As she falls from her window, the gnawing sensation of her good luck power has disappeared. She narrates her feelings: "No flagpoles to catch. No truck full of mattresses to land in. After all the snark, all the bravado. After beating the house on every hand. I'm going to **die**" (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 1*). Domino feels the "mad improbability" of not being "*me*." Here, Domino is an Other to herself, if only briefly, as Desmond and Topaz return her powers to her before she hits the ground, signalling a warning of what is to come for our hero-philosopher: "Lucky I was in the neighborhood," Spider-Man tells Neena as he web slings her to safety (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 1*). But this moment of not being herself, a self without that microscopic element of mutant power, is a moment of terror: she experiences the nothingness. Alongside the affirmation of the indifferent universe, transcending the ego and reflecting upon the chance that is one's existence comprise another element of Domino's philosophy of luck.

This misfortune then allows Domino to lay herself bare, to grasp the nature of her powers, her existence, and as explored below, her relationship with others. At this point early in her story, uncertain about why her good luck had left her, Domino feels anguish. Yet anguish without reason "is in any case much more significant for experience" (Bataille, *Unfinished System* 14). Martin Heidegger suggests that when we experience anguish for no other reason than that we exist, we find positive value in life (§40). Echoing Heidegger, Bataille observes that "Anguish is what makes humankind it seems; not anguish alone, but anguish transcended and the act of transcending it" (*Erotism* 86). Transcending anguish is a gamble: we stand on the edge of the abyss with anguish that may destroy us, cause us to pitch ourselves into the hole, or send us into an ecstatic state, laughing joyously (Bataille, *Unfinished System* 17).

As Bataille had Nietzsche's writings to teach him about anguish, Neena has her own Master to help her transcend it. Shang-Chi teaches Domino to better understand the nature of her good luck and its use-value in battle. Exemplary in this regard is a scene from issue #5, coming after one or more training sessions. As various villains try to kill Shang-Chi in a night club, in an almost meditative state, Domino strolls from the dance floor to the bar (see Figure 4). Her intentional movements—to pick up a serving tray or squeeze a lime—unintentionally result in bad fortune for the evildoers as Domino now submits to possible death and receives good luck. "[I]f good luck favors us," Bataille mentions, "the thing we desire most ardently is the thing most likely to drag us into wild extravagance and ruin us" (*Erotism* 86). "Ruin"

is meant here in a positive sense, as self-consciousness without an object, i.e., a risk-taking that benefits the global movement of energy, as described above. During this same nightclub battle on a separate page, a middle panel shows two enemies rushing at Domino from opposite directions. In a large borderless panel at the bottom of the page suggesting an expanded horizon of movement, Domino backflips into the air not simply to avoid physical harm; rather, her flip causes severe damage to the two enemies as they crash into one another. While her acrobatic skills were needed to make such an intense movement (a movement completed by many, many heroes), it is Domino's faith in luck that makes this self-defence unique. In a voiceover caption, Domino praises the teachings of her Master, Shang-Chi, yet her thanks to the Master are not for her gymnastic abilities but his ontological guidance: trust in her power, trust in luck, and good things will come. For Domino in this nightclub, "misfortune (or chance)" throws her into ecstasy (Bataille, *On Nietzsche* 186-87). After this effortless battle on Domino's part, a close-up shows another smirk: acknowledging chaos, sufficient tutelage, and a rekindled faith in chance, Domino is ready to take on Desmond and Topaz and, as noted above, there is a positive outcome in that confrontation—the good gals win.

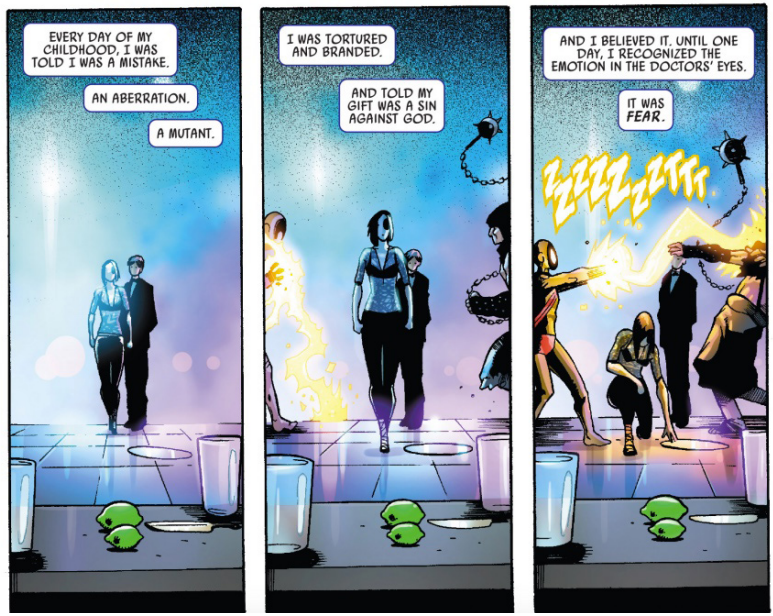

Figure 4. *Domino #5*, in *Domino, Vol. 1: Killer Instinct*, by Gail Simone, David Baldeón, Michael Shelfer, and Jesus Aburtov. ©Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2018.

"She's About to Have '*Feelings*'": Lucky to Have Friends Like These

The wild exuberance of life may lead to one's demise; however, by taking risks, "separate beings communicate. Everything shows through, everything is open and infinite between those who consume intensely" (Bataille, *The Accursed Share* 58-59). As Simone et al. detail in their series, Domino is not only a philosopher who broaches questions about existence through hero-praxis but an individual who forges powerful bonds with those around her. The aforementioned elements of her philosophy of luck generate intimate interpersonal relations. After surviving Topaz and Desmond's attacks, Domino realizes that "we [Diamondback, Outlaw, and herself] put our lives on the line for each other against a vicious killer. And now we're **more** than friends. We're a **posse**" (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 2*). Elsewhere, she calls herself lucky for having friends like Diamondback and Outlaw, and in another short tale, she remembers how quick and good her sexual and romantic relationship was with Piotr "Pete" Rasputin, a.k.a. Colossus, before starting it up again simply because it "feel[s] really nice" (*Annual* #1, Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 2*). Leonard Kirk and Aburtov illustrate the silhouettes of the two lovers in an embrace as the sun sets behind them. Domino's friendships, whether long or short-term, are strong, intense, and loving, and sometimes very physical. This is no surprise for our death-defying hero-philosopher, as brushes with death allow Domino, Outlaw, and Diamondback to communicate. For Bataille:

> "Communication" cannot proceed from one full and intact individual to another. It requires individuals whose separate existence in themselves is *risked*, placed at the limit of death and nothingness; the moral summit is the moment of risk taking, it is a being suspended in the beyond of oneself, at the limit of nothingness. (*On Nietzsche* 19)

Bataille here means a type of communication apart from what we may call the idle chatter of everyday experience (Heidegger §34-35). This communication may be verbal or non-verbal, and is often the latter for Bataille; the simple truth is that when two or more individuals are confronted with their mortality, they laugh and bond, and understand a truth about existence and the chance it entails. Recognition of chance among friends is a recognition of the unlikelihood of coming into the world and, if we were so lucky to be born, how easy it is for the universe to take us out of it; recognition that chance and circumstance contingently allow us to hold on to "me"; and recognition that it is good fortune when we encounter another individual with whom we may laugh in the face of death and communicate intensely. In short, *Domino* offers a coherent, nuanced, and life-affirming onto-ethical system.

Simone's emphasis on intimacy and camaraderie continues her authorial prerogative from her earlier work on *Birds of Prey*, i.e., championing female friendship over heterosexual romance (Cocca 71-72). In *Domino* #2, for example, Neena enlists Amadeus Cho (and his nanites that allow him to become a Hulk) to help uncover

who is behind the disruption of her powers. A tip about a patron on a gambling riverboat leads to another encounter between Domino and Desmond/Topaz, in which the latter sets a trap to kill Neena's friends. The climactic explosion on the final page of the issue shows Domino flying through the air as Outlaw, Diamondback, and Cho's motorboat ends up decimated under a billow of fire and smoke. Issue #3 opens with Domino semi-conscious on the deck of the riverboat lamenting the death of her friends. After a skirmish, Desmond and Topaz leave a battered and wounded Neena to endure the great loss. Yet Simone et al., in a melodramatic turn of events, reveal that Cho (as a Hulk) saved Outlaw and Diamondback from their deaths. Baldeón and Aburtov present all the characters in a big embrace inside a frame that complements the hulking hug (see Figure 5). A similar warm moment arrives at the conclusion of the first arc, in #6, with the friends again sharing a close embrace.

Figure 5. *Domino* #3, in *Domino, Vol. 1: Killer Instinct*, by Gail Simone, David Baldeón, Michael Shelfer, and Jesus Aburtov. ©Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2018.

Domino and her pals throw themselves into perilous situations for mutual, life-saving benefits, and their intimacy is a touching moment. For Domino, her powers and her body are gifts to her friends, often to save their lives: "A gift is truly a gift only to the extent that, however modest, there is an element of impetuousness, recklessness in it. Giving is a passionate act. Giving, by abnegating ownership of resources,

puts the giver at risk. Every act of giving already educes the passion to give one's life" (Lingis, *Dangerous Emotions* 175). Her gift is not utilitarian since the outcome of her good luck power cannot be calculated—chance cannot be tamed, only dammed and rerouted. Domino is a mystic communing with the universe to ensure that she and her friends come out ahead for no other reason than the events shake out that way. If Domino were a utilitarian, her risks would not produce any kind of intimacy since death is no longer a threat; or, worse, she would rarely attempt to sacrifice herself because, unarguably, her powers, skills, and leadership benefit others more than Diamondback's or Outlaw's abilities. Here, Domino also reconciles the philosophical debate between chance and free will, namely, an act can be both free and lucky. Moreover, giving blood—whether willingly as a donation in battle alongside superpowered friends or to a weakened vampire, or metaphorically through physical labour and financial charity—refuses the drive to selfishly conserve energy for future use and affirms that risk-taking facilitates happiness, a happiness that is all the more intense when shared (in a big hug):

> Happiness consists in knowing that we live by luck and in the reckless freedom of staking our life. A wedding feast, an extravagant gift, an exhausting effort made to rescue someone lost at sea or in an avalanche, or a life spent in research that brought no profit and perhaps ended in a dead end—all these forms of potlatch get their meaning from death; they are festive and celebratory ways of dying. (Lingis, *Body Transformations* 144)

Conclusion: "Good Thing I'm so %$@#& Lucky"

Assessing Domino's philosophy of luck will hopefully generate further discussions about this popular character and give her some much-needed attention in scholarly and popular press publications, particularly in the areas of gender, power, sexuality, and embodiment, issues I was not able to touch upon here.[8] Domino is a fascinating hero who continues to appear in Marvel's pages and on Marvel's screens.[9] Within Marvel Comics, as I have explored, she is fascinating because she poses philosophical questions relevant for onto-ethical inquiry, exemplified by Simone's writing and Baldeón, Shelfer, and Aburtov's art. Simone et al. take up philosophy by probing the nature of good fortune through the character's voiceover reflections, the action panels wherein Domino can exhibit her mutant abilities, and Neena's powerful friendships to thereby produce what I have called a philosophy of luck. Comics could engage philosophy specific to its medium; however, I have linked *Domino* with Bataille and found that the series and the philosopher generated a robust onto-ethical theory with three key facets: the universe is indifferent to individual existences, thus good luck for one brings about bad luck for others; when humans acknowledge this indifference, they forego the preservation of the ego, the "me"; and by shedding the ego, human beings can gift their blood, then communicate intimately and ethically. The universe may seem disordered and unfathomable to humans and mutants

alike, given Bataille's theory of the general movement of energy: it does not care how energy is squandered, just that it finds an outlet somehow, somewhere. Yet Domino's praxis-philosophy and Bataille's philosophical project highlight how we can dam and reroute chance and energy in ours and other's favour, if only we are willing to take the risk—in Domino's words, "I **do** bring chaos. Only thing **is** … I make chaos my **bitch**" (Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 1*).

Notes

* My thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for the helpful comments and corrections.

1. For more on comparative approaches to philosophy and Marvel Comics, see Barris and McLaughlin.

2. Section title quotations from Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 1*, except for the final section, taken from Simone et al., *Domino Vol. 2*.

3. Gail Simone is a comics critic and fan turned comics writer. After a 1999 issue of *Green Lantern* in which the eponymous hero's girlfriend is killed and stuffed into a refrigerator, Simone inaugurated a discussion about the role women play in superhero comics, referred to as "Women in Refrigerators." Simone was concerned that women are often used as suffering objects so that heroes then have reason to avenge and fight. With Simone writing *Domino*, the X-Universe has begun to distance itself from "All-White All-Male" characters and creative teams (Cocca 12, 44, 152).

4. Comics scholarship occasionally uncritically praises past generations of Marvel Comics writers and artists. In her review of Ramzi Fawaz's *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*, Anna F. Peppard notes that the author's love of comics perhaps gets in the way of more nuanced analyses. For example, "it is […] unavoidably dishonest to discuss the *X-Men* franchise as a celebration of radical plurality while sidestepping the reality of how few women and racial or sexual minorities have written or drawn *X-Men* comics, as well as the political shortcomings of the straight white men who have, inescapably, dominated their production and consumption" (194).

5. Bold font, here and throughout the article, appears in the comics.

6. *Domino: Hotshots* is a continuation of the *Domino* series, written and drawn by (almost) the same team, but it receives separate issue numbers.

7. Originally published as *La Part maudite: précédé de La notion de dépense* (1949).

8. Recent years have seen the publication of numerous books and articles about superpowered women. Popular press titles that serve as superheroine encyclopedias have yet to include an entry for Domino (Frankel; Maggs et al.; Nicholson). Scholarly publications that discuss superheroine comics and representations of gender, power, sexuality, and embodiment include Cocca; D'Agnostino; Fawaz; Peppard, "Power"; Reyns-Chikuma and Lorenz; and Stuller.

9. Domino was a character in 20th Century Fox's *Deadpool 2* (2018) and, at the time of writing, has appeared in two *X-Force* runs (Brisson, Burnett, Couceiro, and Aburtov; Percy, Cassara, and White).

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