Cut to *A Thousand Plateaus*, page 151:

Mistress, 1) You may tie me down on the table, ropes drawn tight, for ten to fifteen minutes, time enough to prepare the instruments; 2) One hundred lashes at least, a pause of several minutes; 3) You begin sewing, you sew up the hole in the glans; you sew the skin around the glans to the glans itself, preventing the top from tearing; you sew the scrotum to the skin of the thighs. You sew the breasts, securely attaching a button with four holes to each nipple [...]; 7) You give me fifty thrashes on the buttocks; 8) If you wish to intensify the torture and carry out your threat from last time, stick the pins all the way into my buttocks as far as they go; 9) Then you may tie me to the chair; you give me thirty thrashes on the breasts and stick in the smaller pins; if you wish, you may heat them red-hot beforehand, all or some [...]. I haven’t mentioned burns, only because I have a medical exam coming up in awhile, and they take a long time to heal. (quoted, Deleuze and Guattari)

This passage is followed by the assertion that “this is not phantasy, it is a program.” And further still:

The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and significances and subjectifications as a whole. Psychoanalysis does the opposite: it translates everything into phantasies, it converts everything into phantasy, it retains the phantasy. It royally botches the real, because it botches the BwO. (151)

I quote Deleuze and Guattari at length here for two reasons. First, they present a valuable critique of psychoanalysis based on what they perceive as its relative inefficiency, if not its detrimental consequences for the analysand and perhaps the culture at large. Second, and by
extension, what they offer in its stead is action “in the world” (a “pro-
gram,” however extreme), an action that is as artful as it is transgres-
sive of the sexual boundaries that define normative subjectivity. In
this chapter I want to explore further both the limitations of theoreti-
cal constructs that inform such subjectivity, along with their norma-
tive practices, and the possibilities of agency that might develop out of
a theoretical and practical renewal of the real in which action occurs,
to real people and real bodies. Masochism, stripped of its negative,
phantasty-laden stigma, provides not only a potentially sexually reju-
venating erotic art, but is essential, I will argue, to understanding and
enacting the psychology of self-development via the relatively unclut-
tered space and time of minimalism.

The textual analyses that conclude chapters 5 and 6, on The
Body Artist and The Sacrifice, respectively, though treating differ-
ent circumstances in different contexts, clearly reveal the necessity
of embracing suffering as elemental in the pursuit of refined living.
In both cases, this confrontation even takes the form of a “program”
insofar as the protagonists create and execute very precise frame-
works of action. To quote Deleuze once again, “Individuals find a
real name for themselves only through the harshest exercise in deper-
sonalization, by opening themselves to the multiplicities everywhere
within them, to the intensities running through them” (Negotiations
6). The next chapter will examine textual engagement that can func-
tion, even more directly than in literature, film, or music, as a praxis
of depersonalization. But first I want to consider some qualities of
masochism as they ultimately relate to the practice of “composing”
one self in (Western) cultural contexts that are forever attempting to
defer suffering and its obvious association with a fear of death.

Uncomfortable Thresholds

Responding to the kind of narrative that opens this chapter in his
Perversions: The Erotic Form of Hatred, Robert J. Stoller unsurpris-
ingly notes how “hostility in the perverted [masochistic] act is disguised,
maintained secretly in the fantasies of what one is doing to one’s partner
when one is ‘victimized.’ These people have lusciously martyrish gratifi-
cations…which convert the physical victim into psychological victor
over his tormentor” (58). That his book was written in 1975 is no grounds
for dismissing this argument, which puts forth the notion that masochistic
experience is inherently and inevitably based upon its participants’ hos-
tility and competitiveness, that it is perverse beyond acceptable mental