In “Alternative Rhetoric and Morality: Writing from the Margins” David L. Wallace argues for the embracing of alternative rhetoric. He defines alternative rhetoric as rhetoric that “requires acceptance of the responsibility to develop a new kind of rhetorical agency in which we are not only conscious of the limits of our subjectives,” (p. 23) but it is not limited to consciousness of these limitations. Alternative rhetoric must also “take action to understand our complicity in the oppression of others and to educate ourselves in the use of the new discursive practices” (p. 23) Wallace argues that rhetorical theory needs to be redefined and that objectivity does not exist.

To rethink the discourses of power we must develop the alternative rhetorics that go beyond alternative rhetorical theories and practices, but that also recognize that discourse is limiting for some groups and that it may not have that impact on other groups. To do this rhetorical theory must not be satisfied in recognizing and identifying the complexities, nor should it be on the shoulders of those groups limited by discourse to educate. If the oppressed must educate the oppressor, then they are still in service of the oppressor, which if I understand Wallace correctly this would be problematic because the oppressor is not active in understanding their role in the oppression. This idea is similarly discussed in Lorde’s “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.”

Lorde argues that the master’s tools will never be able to dismantle the master’s house. Any attempt will only allow for a temporary victory on the part of the oppressed, and ultimately “never enable us to bring about genuine change” (112). Wallace also views the problem similarly, when he argues that the action can’t only be depending on the oppressed. It must be something worked on by both the oppressor and the oppressed. Lorde differs from Wallace here. She does not see that the master, or oppressor, would ever truly be concerned enough to be part of the change.

A benefit of alternative rhetoric, according to Wallace, is that it gives us a means to identify a wide range of techniques the groups limited by discourse can use to “gain substantive copresence” (p. 22). Wallace also urges that we think about our own position within the discourse of power. To do this we are to “consider that what we see as a good, right or even well argued is always conditioned by our place in society” (p. 21) and that it also exists within what we teach.

Wallace uses the work Gloria Anzaldua as an example, and in some instances a model, for the approach scholars need to take in attempting to create alternative rhetorics.

The significance of these readings is to address the fact that some movements in rhetoric can be silenced, or are unable gain enough traction to be part of rhetorical theory, composition pedagogy, and curriculum. The call for alternative rhetorics by Wallace is obviously in response to certain perspectives valued more than others. Where these readings, and others, may alert us to an issue and make us aware of them, the significance of this Wallace stems from the notion that awareness is not enough. Scholarly action needs to take place.