Freelance dramaturgs have an increasing presence in the UK, due in part to the unstoppable trend in our theatre culture towards identifying, developing and producing the work of new playwrights. Dramaturgs in this country are defined largely by their relationship to playwrights. The proliferation of new writing schemes, writer-support programmes nationwide and the Arts Council's funding system now benefiting individual artists has led to more and more playwrights seeking development and feedback on their work, leading to a potentially unhealthy expectation on the part of playwrights that workshop development is now a rite of passage, rather than a selective process designed to foster the artistic excellence of those playwrights who demonstrate substantial talent.

Is it ethical to tell any playwright to stop writing? Does the new writing industry suffer from altruism? Are we developing too many playwrights and producing too few? Since the heady days of the 'in-yer-face' nineties with all their promises of a new wave of British writing talent we have not only seen an unhealthy rise in one-hit wonder playwrights, their careers diverted to TV or film or, at worst, not at all, whilst the theatres sniff out fresh blood, but also a rather fetishistic approach to the label of the 'new' and a proliferation of rehearsed readings, scratch performances and writer support schemes that present half-baked ideas of plays that just aren't ready to be seen by an audience.

These are issues which, from a freelancer's perspective, are pertinent to our privileged position: unattached to any theatre building, unencumbered by artistic policies or artistic directors, budget constraints, production expectations or season co-ordination, we are free to work solely and objectively on the playwright's work. We help them to shape their vision. Artistic excellence is what takes priority.

Peter Gill wrote a couple of years ago about his fear of a rising 'first-draft' culture, of playwrights who no longer take pride in their work, expecting schemes and initiatives to solve all their problems and give them all the answers. Their expectations rise, and the quality of unsolicited plays received by theatres plummets, as does the existence of playwrights who craft and draft and re-draft their work and show it only when they know for sure it is ready. Gill's projections might be scaremongering, but they also open a debate about thresholds of artistic quality; are the plays that theatres are racing to develop actually any good? Or are they just new?

As British theatre-makers we have inherited a culture that places the spoken word on stage with a higher status than that of the image; images are things that are born of dialogue, one hand leading another, its amorphous language subservient and dependent. Paradoxically, playwrights are continuously told that actions speak louder than words, to never use language when the action can do it for you, not to overload the play with explanation and of course, *show* and don't *tell*. Our facility for theatrical storytelling must be trained to deal with both as independent beings, alongside understanding the explosive theatrical potential of their relationship. The freelance dramaturgs' responsibility, as a practitioner working simultaneously across regions and new writing contexts, is surely to move theatre-making in these new directions, to introduce innovative practice and to promote the active application of questioning our own choices and habits as playwrights, directors and performers, putting the artist one step ahead of a threateningly homogenous culture of logocentric social-realist plays.