

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CORRECT PREPOSITIONS

by Richard Kostelanetz

I remember the Austrian-born film director Billy Wilder introducing his American-educated collaborator, I. A. L. Diamond, as his “translator” especially skilled at “telling me which preposition to use.”

The truth is that the wrong preposition in English can be revealing, as well as deceptive. I’ve a German friend who still says that he’s been in America “since thirty years.” Similarly, to say that an alarmingly large number of human beings “died of COVID-19” is very different from saying they “died *with* COVID-19,” which is far more true with the verifiable presence of other morbidities.

What would most of us think of some purported authority declaring that millions “died of sniffles”?