

Born-dead Metaphor

When BBC Ceefax reported the successful candidate as saying, the day after the U.S. presidential election of 2004, “I have political capital and I intend to spend it, I thought it must be a mistake, but *The Week* repeated the report.[13.11.04] It is possible that comments were made on this figure of speech, but I did not see them. So I started by taking it as a leading example of the modern style of dead metaphor. In the bad old days a good lively metaphor used to catch on so successfully that it was worked to death and became a *cliché*. A good example is the word *cliché* itself or the English equivalent *stereotyped*, a metaphor that has lingered on long after the process of stereotyping became obsolete. The new kind is born dead, and depends on our *not* understanding the figure. In a previous column I think we have already mentioned *drawing a line in the sand*. In the real world, of the flickering screens, if you are lucky enough to have capital the thing to do with it is invest it, not spend it. A financial adviser who told you how to spend capital would be had up for mis-selling, and in any case anyone can do it without any advice at all. President Bush is said to be a not very intelligent man, but he seems to have improved on the born-dead metaphor by inventing one that if treated as real does have sense. He does intend to spend the new-found capital entrusted him by 51% of the voters. Having blown whatever political capital he had, he desperately needed more to fund his politically extravagant lifestyle, and we may be sure it will all have gone by the year 2008.