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Capital as Coordination: A Synthesis Encompassing Marx and CasP

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Capital as Coordination:

A Synthesis Encompassing Marx and CasP

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The global system we inhabit is often described in terms of markets, capital, and labor, but beneath these abstractions lies the deeper question of how coordination produces power and how power organizes coordination. Among the most influential traditions attempting to answer this question are Marxism and Capital as Power (CasP), two frameworks that, while sharing certain roots, diverge sharply in their interpretation of what capital is and how it operates.

Marxism, originating in the 19th-century writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, posits that capitalism is a system of class-based exploitation in which a capitalist minority controls the means of production and extracts surplus labor from the working majority. In this tradition, capital is seen not merely as money or machines but as a social relation of production, a way of organizing human labor through ownership and control. Central to Marxist theory is the concept of value,

rooted in labor: it is through human work that commodities gain value, and it is through controlling labor that capitalists accumulate wealth and power.

Capital as Power (CasP) emerges from a different trajectory. Developed by Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler, CasP retains many of Marxism's core concerns, especially the emphasis on power and systemic domination, but rejects the labor theory of value and redefines capital not as a productive input but as a quantifiable expression of power. In this view, capital is not about production, but about the capacity to shape social organization through strategic sabotage, control, and differential accumulation. Market capitalization, in this framework, is not a measure of underlying productivity but of expected future power.

Crucially, CasP is not an external rejection of Marxism; it is a direct evolution from within it. Nitzan and Bichler were trained in political economy and grounded their critique in a deep engagement with Marxist theory. Their divergence lies in the belief that capitalism cannot be understood by appealing to any "real" economy behind financial appearances. Instead, CasP insists that power, not production, is the foundation of capital, and that sabotage, not efficiency, is the true engine of accumulation.

This divergence has led to ongoing tension. Marxists often argue that CasP misrepresents or abandons the core of Marx's critique, while CasP theorists argue that Marxism remains tethered to outdated economic metaphysics. Both claim to reveal capitalism's inner workings. But must we choose between them?

This essay argues that we do not. Through the lens of Coordination: the Fabric of Power (CfP), a broader theoretical framework that views coordination itself as the primary material of power, we can move beyond this impasse. Rather than asking whether capital is labor-time or capitalization, CfP reframes the question: How is coordination patterned, withheld, or manipulated in ways that produce asymmetries of power? In doing so, it offers a synthesis that integrates the structural insights of Marxism with the empirical clarity of CasP, not by erasing their differences, but by metabolizing their strongest claims.

What follows is a synthesis that retains the most essential elements of both frameworks, those that reveal how power is embedded in systems of coordination, and shows how CfP incorporates them into a new conceptual architecture.

From Value to Pattern

In Marx's labor theory of value, value arises from the socially necessary labor time embodied in commodities. In CasP, value is a forward-looking estimate of control, expressed through market capitalization. CfP suggests a deeper structure behind both: value is a measure of coordinated coherence. Capitalist markets use prices and profits as proxies for the coordination of labor, logistics, narrative, and control, but these proxies are imperfect reflections of an underlying pattern dynamic.

Where Marxism sees surplus value as extracted from labor, and CasP sees sabotage as a key to differential accumulation, CfP sees both as forms of strategic pattern disruption and redirection. The capitalist does not simply extract labor or manipulate finance; they orchestrate patterns of dependence, access, and delay. Profit, then, is a signal not of productive output or future cash, but of coordination dominance.

Capital as Thread Architecture

In CfP, society is woven from threads, units of coordination that flow through bodies, systems, and time. Capital, in this sense, is a bundle of tightly woven threads that persist through institutional reinforcement: contracts, legal rights, supply chains, psychological internalizations, and algorithmic governance. Marx's "relations of production" and CasP's "differential accumulation" are both manifestations of this deeper architecture.

Thus, we don't need to ask whether capital is about exploitation (Marx) or exclusion (CasP). It is both, and more. It is the stabilization of certain coordination threads at the expense of others. Wage labor is one such thread; financial control is another. Capital is not merely a thing one possesses, but an ongoing ability to shape which threads get woven, and how tightly.

Power Beyond Domination

CasP powerfully critiques the myth of capital as productive, showing how dominant actors often profit through sabotage, restriction, and crisis. Marxism roots that power in class struggle and surplus extraction. CfP expands both analyses. It shows that power emerges not only from who owns what or who controls what, but from how coordination is structured, internalized, and reproduced.

Coordination can be:

- **Power Over**: domination through exclusion and control (aligns with CasP's sabotage and Marx's class hierarchy),
- **Power Through**: emergent amplification via participation,
- **Power With**: generative synergy across actors,
- **Power Within**: the internalization of coherent agency.

Capitalism, in this view, is a historically dominant way of enshrining Power Over coordination through durable thread architectures. But it is not the only way humans can organize. Other value systems and other power forms can be constructed.

Toward a Post-Capital Value Framework

CfP doesn't simply resolve the dispute between Marx and CasP; it transcends it, offering tools to map, measure, and reprogram coordination itself. Rather than treating value as inherent in labor or capital flows, CfP treats value as the potential for life-affirming coordination. This opens the way to post-capitalist metrics rooted in ecological health, collective agency, and resonance across systems.

By shifting the question from "What is capital?" to "What patterns of coordination are being sustained, and for whom?", CfP reframes the terrain entirely. Capital is not an object to abolish or a mechanism to refine, it is a temporary arrangement of threads. And it can be rewoven.

The Synthesis: What Must Be Retained from Marxism and Capital as Power

To move beyond the debate between Marxist political economy and the Capital as CasP framework, CfP must operate not by choosing sides, but by extracting the structural insights and empirical clarity each offers. Both traditions contain indispensable contributions that, if held in productive tension, can illuminate the fabric of contemporary capitalism more comprehensively. Below, we outline the elements that must be retained from each, not as compromises, but as foundational components of a more complete theory of coordination.

From Marxism: The Social Anatomy of Production

1. Capital as a Social Relation of Production

At its heart, Marxism recognizes that capital is not simply a thing; neither a machine nor a sum of money, but a form of social power expressed through material organization. Capital emerges as a relationship between classes, a way of structuring access to the means of subsistence, mobility, and self-determination. This relational insight is essential for any theory that seeks to explain how power functions within coordinated systems. Within CfP, this becomes a lens for understanding how threads of coordination are distributed unequally, particularly in productive systems where some command and others comply.

2. Labor as a Core Mode of Coordination

Labor, for Marx, is not merely an economic input; it is a fundamental form of coordinated activity, central to the reproduction of society. The labor theory of value, though contested, serves heuristically to highlight how human effort and time remain the substrate of wealth production. CfP retains this view by treating labor as one of the primary fields in which coordination is both expressed and contested. Patterns of coordination that govern labor, its extraction, its control, and its alienation are central to understanding power dynamics within any system.

3. Surplus Extraction and Exploitation

Capital accumulation depends on the asymmetrical coordination of human activity: some organize the labor of others to capture surplus, whether in the form of profit, rents, or status. This is not merely economic but profoundly political. Exploitation, within CfP, becomes a way to describe how threads are pulled without reciprocal weaving, how certain actors benefit from systemic entanglement while others are constrained or depleted by it.

4. Historical Materialism and Dialectics

Marxism's dialectical method reveals capitalism as a historically contingent and internally contradictory system. Coordination patterns are never static; they unfold, clash, and mutate. CfP takes up this temporal view, recognizing that coordination evolves not in a smooth arc but through ruptures, feedbacks, and bifurcations. Understanding power thus demands attention to history, transition, and the accumulation of coordination residues over time.

From Capital as Power: The Quantification and Strategy of Control

1. Capital as Quantified Power (Differential Accumulation)

CasP reconceives capital not as productive capacity but as a quantifiable claim on power, expressed through differential accumulation. Capitalists seek not just profit, but relative dominance, which manifests in the capitalization process itself. Market value becomes a proxy not for productivity, but for the expected ability to shape and control social coordination. CfP absorbs this insight by interpreting capital as a thread density metric, a measure of how tightly an actor or institution is interwoven into strategic nodes of coordination.

2. Sabotage and Friction as Strategic Tools

Perhaps CasP's most novel contribution is the centrality of sabotage, not accident but strategy, in capitalist accumulation. Capitalists maintain or grow their power not through productive efficiency but by intentionally creating bottlenecks, scarcity, and dependency. From planned obsolescence to regulatory capture, these are acts of discoordination deployed to extract coordination rents. CfP incorporates this fully, treating sabotage as one form of thread manipulation, a perversion of coordination that maintains power by inducing friction in others' autonomy.

3. Market Capitalization as a Power Metric

CasP offers an empirical window into the otherwise abstract flows of power: capitalization. Stock prices, mergers, and financial instruments become indicators of expected control over future coordination. While Marxism critiques finance as fictitious capital, CfP sees in CasP's use of capitalization a map of anticipated coordination influence, one that can be tracked, forecasted, and reverse-engineered.

4. Capitalism as a Mode of Strategic Domination

CasP breaks definitively with the idea that capitalism is a system of efficient production and resource allocation. Instead, it reveals a mode of strategic domination, where coordination is hoarded, engineered, and weaponized. CfP builds on this, offering a broader theory of how patterns of coordination, regardless of their productive content, become the terrain upon which power emerges and acts.

Why These Elements Matter

Retaining these elements is not an act of theoretical charity but a necessity. Marxism roots the analysis of coordination in embodied social relations, in the struggles of people working, surviving, and resisting. It ensures CfP remains grounded in lived power. CasP, meanwhile, exposes the machinery of control: the symbolic, financial, and institutional architectures that quantify and reinforce power in the name of capital. It helps CfP see the invisible scaffolding of dominance that coordination patterns can both reinforce and subvert.

How CfP Integrates the Two

CfP does not reduce capital to either productive labor or symbolic control, it renders both as entangled threads in a wider coordination field. In this framework:

- Labor becomes a field of dense, high-friction coordination, often manipulated but never eliminated.
- Sabotage is understood as a negative coordination tool, the disruption of others' threading to preserve one's own asymmetry.
- Capital accumulation is recast as the strategic thickening of one's thread density, often at the expense of others' autonomy or capacity to self-coordinate.
- Value, power, and conflict are all functions of how coordination is enabled, blocked, hijacked, or scaled.

This synthesis does not flatten differences, it metabolizes them. It invites both Marxists and CasP theorists into a shared space where the material, symbolic, strategic, and embodied dimensions of power can be woven together into a more complete understanding of what capital truly is: a pattern of power, maintained through coordination and its denial.

Conclusion: A New Common Ground

If Marxism gave us the critique of exploitation and CasP gave us the measurement of control, then CfP offers a grammar for understanding how power coheres across systems, not only in capital, but in culture, governance, infrastructure, and desire. It does not ask Marxists to abandon the

centrality of labor or class struggle, nor does it require CasP scholars to return to the metaphysics of value. Instead, it invites both into a broader theoretical ecosystem where coordination itself is the fabric of social life, and power is the capacity to pattern that fabric, to bind, sever, twist, or reweave.

To Marxists, CfP offers a chance to update the analytic core of historical materialism without discarding its emancipatory urgency. By treating labor as one thread among many, and surplus as one form of extractive coordination, it preserves the heart of Marx's insight while allowing for analysis of non-waged domination, algorithmic command, and affective economies. It extends the terrain of class struggle to include everywhere that asymmetrical coordination is enforced.

To adherents of Capital as Power, CfP affirms the central thesis that power, not productivity, is the real object of accumulation, but reframes it within a broader ecology of coordination. Where CasP often focuses on measurement, CfP returns to meaning-making: how threads are internalized, how patterns become habits, and how people resist or reprogram the systems that bind them. It broadens sabotage beyond capital accumulation and asks what generative, liberatory patterns could emerge in its absence.

For both traditions, CfP is not a rival but a resonance, a framework that refuses to let method ossify into dogma, or theory sever from practice. In an age of ecological crisis, algorithmic governance, and fractal inequality, we need tools that can track power not only through profit margins but through supply chains, attention economies, communal narratives, and digital infrastructures.

This is the wager of CfP: that if we learn to see power as the capacity to pattern coordination, and coordination as the substrate of all social life, then we can build a politics that is not merely reactive, but compositional. A politics that not only critiques what is, but practices how we might thread otherwise.

To Marxists, to CasP theorists, and to all those asking what comes after critique: let us meet not at the margins of disagreement, but at the center of the weave.

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