Deriving an asymmetrical syntax from symmetrical merge

There seems to be an inherent incompatibility between the now widespread view that the core combinatorial operation in natural language, Merge, is fundamentally symmetrical and the widespread evidence that human language is full of asymmetries in terms of word order (Greenberg 1963, Kayne 1994, 2000, 2013, Cinque 2006, Sheehan, Biberauer, Holmberg and Roberts 2017) but also binding (Chomsky 1980) and extraction/subextraction (Huang 1984, Pesetsky 2017, Polinksy 2018, etc.). This leaves us with two basic options: either these asymmetries are not syntactic but rather derived from something else, with the best candidate being parsing- related preferences (see Abels and Neeleman 2012, Brody 2013, Culicover & Winkler 2010, 2018) or the syntax must become asymmetric derivationally, either by virtue of the way it is spelled out (Uriagereka 1999, Nunes and Uriagereka 2001) or labelled (Hornstein 2009, Chomsky 2013).

In this talk, I argue for a specific version of this second position: Merge creates symmetrical structures which then become asymmetrical derivationally. The strongest evidence for this position comes not from word order, but from extraction restrictions. I consider evidence for this position from: (i) parameterization of Huang's (1984) Condition on Extraction Domain, (ii) extraction from derived specifiers and (iii) extraction from adjuncts/parasitic gaps. I then show that the system needed to derive these patterns also easily accounts for binding and word order asymmetries, including the Final-over-Final Constraint.