In contemporary Western Europe, the UK is somewhat an exception in its ambition to construct a new fleet of nuclear power reactors, an ambition that has proved to be problematic over the past few decades. Most European countries have committed to discontinuing or reducing their nuclear capacity to the extent that such policies could be considered the ‘norm’ in Western Europe, as well as potential signifiers of a new emerging socio-technical regime. If notions of purely ‘rational’ responses to the challenges of climate change and energy security being the sole motivators for the UK’s nuclear policy are, for the purposes of analytical focus shifted to the background, then the UK’s continuation of its nuclear new build agenda may be considered as an example of ‘extraordinary’ sameness. The sameness exhibited by continual attempts to construct new nuclear can be considered extraordinary given several factors: a history of prohibitive costs, failed new build attempts, the presence of alternative low carbon technologies, recent nuclear ‘events’, and current trajectories in nuclear policy - factors that if anything could be assumed to contribute to commitments towards non-nuclear socio-technical trajectories. Clearly this builds on notions of technological lock-in, however more focus is placed here on the agency embroiled in sustaining continuation in policy.

This presentation builds on recent discussions in transitions theory and the Multi-level Perspective around ‘destabilisation’ and more recently, the ‘governance of discontinuation’. A primary focus on Discontinuation rather than innovation asks how a point is reached, such as that exhibited by Germany’s decision to phase-out nuclear power, where it becomes feasible for a governance system to enact the closing-down of powerful incumbent technologies and associated industries. The flip side to this focus asks how, on the contrary, despite potentially better suited conditions for discontinuation, ‘sameness’ in policy selection prevails such as in the UK. In assessing this, several under-examined themes are explored: firstly, the paper builds on more politicised accounts of socio-technical transitions, including work which examines the strategies and tactics of incumbent actors to maintain a privileged position. Secondly, the focus of this paper draws attention to the study of the ‘distributed decision’ and the importance of considering the locations of decision-making. This in turn, places focus on the under-examined ‘state’. Several forms of the state are explored, and one particular theme, military-related innovations and development historically exhibiting some aspects of concept of the ‘deep state’, is explored as a potential factor in the production of sameness.