25-Hour Economy: Chocolate Grids, Concrete Silos and the Afterlife of Promise

To encounter Neal Hoey's *25-Hour Economy* exhibition project (2025) at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology's (KNUST) Water Gallery, is to inhabit a ghostly blueprint of Ghana's infrastructural, social and ideological modernity. A modernity designed in the fervour of political independence of the 1950s and the republican status of the 1960s and still echoed in the architectural environments, social processes and philosophical reflections today.

Hoey's intervention engages with Ghana's built environments, particularly the economic self-reliance projects conceived under its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, which aimed to translate Ghana's rhetoric of independence into tangible material transformation and political self-determination. Nkrumah's conviction was that architecture in the new politically independent Ghana would resonate with the hum of everyday life, to animate social consciousness with the vitality of material and economic forces. Architecture, therefore, encoded the new African social order of collective progress and solidarity into its spatial grammar of daily life. To Nkrumah, universities were not ivory towers or neutral containers in which research was produced for its own sake, cut off from the realities of ordinary people; rather, they functioned hand in hand. "The time has come for the gown to come to town", is how he famously put it [1]. Here also, design and architecture were pedagogical apparatuses capable of shaping and transforming social consciousness. Hoey's project recasts these forms, long rendered inert, reawakening them as repositories of memory and possibility. It listens to the residues of post-colonial architecture — not merely as stylised optimism, but as a testament to a kind of collective forging. The exhibition becomes a choreography of time — past, present, future — collapsing within the frame of a building that still gestures, still teaches.

Alongside mega-industrial, projects such as the Akosombo Dam, the Tema Harbour and industrial complexes[2] and other iconic buildings like the halls of residence and the Senior Staff Club at KNUST emerged[3]. Nkrumah privileged mass gathering spaces over private luxury, embodying a political aesthetic of equality, solidarity and collective futurity. His architectural programme was thus not only infrastructural but also ideological, and its humanism aligned with Pan-African and Non-Aligned socialist values. Ghana's post-independence architectural legacy is therefore inseparable from the political philosophy of Kwame Nkrumah. This vision remains visible in Ghana's architectural landscape: concrete, modular and rectilinear forms built between 1958 and 1966 during Nkrumah's industrialisation.

It is within this ideological heritage that the blaxTARLINES project at the Kumasi Art School at KNUST operates today. Its collectivist premise and deliberate dialogue are drawn from egalitarian principles that honour the general intellect of all persons[4]. For instance, the artist kąrî'kąchä seid'ou's pedagogical practice, which birthed blaxTARLINES, advances a model of learning where one's epistemic gap, the distance between one's ignorance and one's knowledge, exists within the self of the learner and not as a hierarchy imposed from outside.

To kąrî'kąchä, it is essential that intellectual emancipation is self-generated under conditions that are common, such that one's choice of freedom is understood as the capacity to act without indebting oneself to external authority[5].

It is this intellectual and spatial terrain that Hoey encountered at the art school in KNUST. Hoey's artworks are centrally informed by his architectural sensibilities. He stresses that his practice is often generated textually and conversationally, drawing equally from reading material and the perspectives of his surroundings. During his exchange at Kumasi Art School, the intellectual and spatial terrain of blaxTARLINES served as another one of these perspectives.

Hoey's debut Kumasi exhibition, *25-Hour Economy*, at the Water Gallery, comprises two linked installations that stage a conversation between commodity surfaces and state infrastructures, reading Ghana's present through forms inherited from earlier promises. In *Ltd., AG, Mies v. d. R.*, Hoey connects the intimate scale of consumption and the monumental quality of state infrastructure. Serial image transfers of "Made in Ghana" chocolate bars showcasing the Ghana Black Star symbol are arranged on the Water Gallery walls in a grid — an ironic display, considering that the brand is owned by a German/EU parent company. The chocolate-lattice reads as ledger as much as ornament, a tally of extraction and circulation in which national aspiration is folded into global appetites veiled under political correctness. The wit is pointed rather than playful: a tongue-in-cheek note that carries the weight of unkept or missed futures.
The Water Gallery's layout plan sharpens the question of how forms shape meaning.
In a space of four cubicles, the cruciform arrangement hovers between outcomes: closed, it risks casting the shadow of a swastika[6]; open, it tends toward a cross. The hinge is not merely symbolic. It names a choice about what is made possible by design and what is foreclosed.

The chocolate-bar lattice echoes the facades of International Style modernism — Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building (1958) and Le Corbusier, foremost, but ultimately the so-called prestige projects of the Nkrumah Era, including the Job 600 and KNUST. The *Gamer Change*, a play on "Game Changer", on the other hand, is a sculptural assemblage that evokes the 1960s cocoa and grain silos in Tema and Tamale — structures realised by Eastern Bloc architects under Nkrumah, shaped by Yugoslav and allied precedents. Those Brutalist cylinders and facades once sketched an industrial horizon aligned with socialist and Non-Aligned partners, a willful departure from the colonial lexicon toward a language of technology, planning and social equity[7]. Together, the works "map" place through an artist's route — Irish, based in Germany, arriving in Kumasi — and through Ghana's own routes, from factory to chocolate wrapper, from Non-Aligned industrial optimism to today's consumer economies. What remains is the tension between the forms that promised a common good and the markets that repurpose those forms to price it.

Fast-forward sixty-five years, and contemporary Ghana faces a different but resonant moment. Since 1 July 2025, the freshly sworn-in government has begun implementing the nationwide Accelerated Export Development Programme (24H+), positioned as an economic reboot aimed at extending economic activity beyond conventional hours and integrating key sectors into a seamless value chain. In this juxtaposition of past and present, Hoey's work draws out the continuities and ruptures between the infrastructural ambitions of the Nkrumah era and the current push for export-oriented growth. By situating historical industrial symbols alongside present-day economic strategies, Hoey seeks to expose and connect the shifting power relations and value systems that shape Ghana's material, political and cultural landscapes today.

Hoey's subsequent and second project in Kumasi moved towards more spontaneous, collaborative-dematerialised, experiential form. The *Unseen Listener* (2025) was a site-contingent performance; unfolding not in a gallery setting but, in the fluid, heterotopic space of a public trotro minibus. Over and back, a 47 km route from Tech Junction through Ejisu, Ayeduase, Kotei, Ahinsan and Atonsu, collaborator Pious Fiifi Davies read Haytham El Wardany's *How to Disappear*[8] translating and interpreting into Twi, provoking conversations among passengers. This mobile, time-bound performance folded multiple temporalities into a single moving space, echoing sites that simultaneously juxtapose incompatible conditions and times[9]. A trotro is a public transport means that has a set of relations that are not delineated sites; of encumbered contemporaneous issues, within themselves qualities that intrinsically heterogenous and re-situated art in the lived social field rather than the autonomous institutional frame. Fifteen years from Neal's intervention, artist Heartwill Kankam of the 2010 BFA Painting graduating class employed the trotro idiom, albeit with different motivations. Women took over the roles of "Driver" and "Mate" (conductor), traditionally the preserve of adult working-class men. They plied the 8 km long route back and forth and in several iterations from about 9 am till 5 pm picking up passengers at various stops along the way. Different from Hoey's, Kankam's intervention retained the commercial transactions of the trotro transport business[10]. Kankam's role combined the curatorial and artistic and redefined exhibition concepts and percepts of space and time while joining contemporaneous issues on gender politics.

By inserting the work into the everyday transportation system, the intervention shifts from object to situation, from representation to an embodied encounter. Hoey and Kankam bypass the space of art institutions and, in doing so, recalibrate both the making and the reception of the artworks. The works inserted themselves into the social fabric to activate artistic form that is socially embedded and cannot be aesthetically predictable.

By embedding the *Unseen Listener* production within public, non-proprietary space, Hoey's practice engages in ideological investment in spatial collectivism into contemporary artistic praxis. In both cases — whether through architectural form or performative encounter — the material conditions of space operating as a means of conscious formation and collective participation. Ghana's post-independence socialist modernism thus persists not only as an architectural heritage but as an active philosophical resource to actively participate in proposing new social forms and publics.

Nantume Violet
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1 Kwame Nkrumah, *The African Genius: Speech Delivered at the Opening of the Institute of African Studies.* University of Ghana, Legon. Accra: Government Printer, 1963.

2 The Economist, 1966

3 William J.R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900.* London: Phaidon, 1996. The buildings are variants of the International Style infused with socialist modernist principles — rationality, egalitarianism, and collective orientation.

4 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

5 kąrî'kąchä seid'ou, interview by Nantume Violet. *Non-reciprocal Gifts* (July 15, 2025).

6 Variants of the swastika symbol can be found among the Asante brass-cast gold weights and in the Adinkra canon. The Adinkra version, *Nkontim*, depicts a hairstyle of the royal court attendants of a queen. These Ghanaian versions predate the Nazi appropriation of the symbol.

7 Łukasz Stanek, Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. Colonial cities in the Gold Coast were built around segregation, hierarchy, and European tastes. Nkrumah's post-independence modernist projects rejected these symbols of colonial dominance, replacing them with functional, geometric, international forms.

8 A performance by Leo Zeine, Neal Hoey in collaboration with Pious Fiifi Davies, read Haytham El Wardany's *How to Disappear* (2018), a text that proposes a set of aural exercises that show readers how to disappear, reappear, join a group, or leave a group. The book, whose title runs counter to a title's traditional function, obscures its subject rather than reveals it. The book is grounded in the experience of the unseen listener. Speakers are seen when they speak, whereas listeners recede into the background of the scene dominated by speakers. Listeners spend a long time listening to what is around them, and hope to maintain their quieter position when they speak, their speech having no need to take front row or appear in the spotlight.

9 Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces.* Diacritics, 1986: 22–27.

10 kąrî'kąchä seid'ou, Text, Kumasi, 2010.