The establishment of mission stations was one of the cornerstones of colonial expansion into South Africa. Focusing on four core requirements – spirituality, education, communication and health – mission stations put churches, schools and hospitals to use in the colonisation of community and culture. In the colonial Cape Province, William Shaw founded a chain of Wesleyan Methodist stations, later located within apartheid’s ‘independent’ homelands of Ciskei and Transkei. In 1825, Mount Coke was established to serve black communities on the outskirts of the town named after the British monarch, Sir Edward Coke. It is where Reverend John Whittle Appleyard translated the bible into isiXhosa and where the first editions of that bible subsequently were printed. However, the mission is remembered more for its role as a key regional hospital and its important work in primary health care, tuberculosis treatment and midwifery services. And in 1959, Mount Coke’s wards, dwellings and chapel were proclaimed a national monument.

In 1994, at the formal demise of apartheid, Mount Coke was reassigned to ‘democratic’ South Africa’s Department of Health.

Contemporary literature makes mention of two kinds of structures that commemorate ideologies: conventional monuments and counter-monuments. Much has been written about buildings of apartheid, and a large body of scholarship has interrogated the links between Afrikaner nationalism and the built form. Further, considerable work engages with the monuments of apartheid, examining how built forms perpetuate and entrench ideologies of oppression. Leading South African photographers’ comprehensive visual analysis complement these sites of knowledge production. However, the South African contemporary is defined by the struggle against apartheid, inspiring significant monumentalising exemplified in institutions such as the Apartheid Museum, Freedom Park and the Red Location Museum. Searching for possible structures with which to counteract grand narratives and oppose accepted visual iconographies of power, I begin to imagine an inadvertent monument.

Conceptualising a third, as yet unexplored, possibility, beyond the deliberately conventional or self-consciously counter-, I imagine inadvertent monuments as structures in the process of destruction, vandalism, neglect and ruination, monuments to the folly of apartheid’s oppressive ideology.

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1 For example, see blank: Architecture, apartheid and after, Eds. Judin Hell and Ivan Vladislavic, NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, 1998.
Mount Coke Inadvertent Monument I: Unnatural Disaster, Triptych of pigment prints on paper on aluminium, 3 (58 x 70cm)

Brenton Maart, The Ruins of Mount Coke
Mount Coke Inadvertent Monument II: Pathways of folly, Triptych of pigment prints on paper on aluminum, 3 (58 x 70cm)
Meanwhile, alongside... Triptych of pigment prints on paper on aluminum, 3 (58 x 70cm)