

Preface

What does it mean to remember disasters that have not yet occurred? In this volume, Tomás Usón takes us into the Peruvian Andes and shows how people in the Callejón de Huaylas region experience disaster events – past earthquakes or future glacial lake outbursts – as dynamic assemblages of material things, stories, political struggles and sensitive landscapes. He argues that disasters are not singular events that strike over time. Instead, he describes them as complex configurations composed of geological forces, urban planning, political narratives and human practices.

The author illuminates how these assemblages of disaster become visible in the ‘temporal ecologies’ of the region: in the monuments commemorating the destruction of Yungay, in the archaeological heritage of Pumacayán being renegotiated through the urban transformation of Huaraz and in the tensions surrounding early warning systems. Usón’s ethnographic lens focuses on these nodes – or, as he describes it using the Quechua concept of *tinku*, a ‘gathering in difference’ – where diverse worldviews, technologies and material forces converge and vie for interpretive authority over the past and the shaping of the future.

Disaster-thinking thus becomes more than a passive act of remembrance. It emerges as an active process of negotiating power relations, shaping memories and building a future in which the next disaster already exists as a possibility. Disasters meet in temporal tensions between past and future events. The book makes clear that in the Andes, the past, present and future do not exist as separate entities, but as an interwoven and contested temporal landscape.

For environmental anthropology, Usón’s approach is significant because, by describing social and material dynamics as assemblages, he moves beyond any dichotomous view of nature or environment. In doing so, he also demonstrates pragmatically how theoretical vocabulary can yield new insights in the empirical analysis of these fields, addressing urgent questions in disaster research and climate change.

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