



Into the Zone of the Interior: A Novel View of Anti-Psychiatry

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Abstract

Zone of the Interior is a satirical novel by an American, Clancy Sigal, about 1960s British anti-psychiatry, in particular, R. D. Laing, the radical Scottish psychiatrist and his idea (shared most notably by David Cooper, another existential therapist working in England) that schizophrenic breakdown might be a natural, healing process. Sigal's little-known novel can help us think about the nature of anti-psychiatry and contribute to the resurgence of interest in it as we approach the 25th anniversary of Laing's death. While Sigal, who was a patient and collaborator of Laing and worked in a democratized hospital unit set up by Cooper, lampoons anti-psychiatric doctors, the novel is a fundamentally sympathetic critique of anti-psychiatry: patients and nurses are the heroes, ordinariness wins out over madness as self-discovery, and anti-psychiatry is skillfully linked to issues of class, gender and New Left politics.

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