Allen Ginsberg, Interview on the Counter Culture and the Cold War

INTERVIEW WITH ALLEN GINSBERG (8/11/96)

INTERVIEWER: Could you tell me how you personally experienced the restrictive Cold War atmosphere that came through the Fifties?

ALLEN GINSBERG: Well, part of that atmosphere was the sort of anti-Communist hysteria of McCarthyism, but culminating in '53 or so, with the execution of the Rosenbergs. It was a little harsh. Whatever they did, it wasn't worth killing people, you know, killing them. I remember sending a wire to Eisenhower and saying: "No, that's the wrong thing." Drawing blood like that is the wrong thing, because it's ambiguous; and especially, there was one commentator on the air, called Fulton Lewis, who said that they smelt bad, and therefore should die. There was an element of anti-Semitism in it. But I remember very clearly on the radio, this guy Fulton Lewis saying they smelt bad. He was a friend of J. Edgar Hoover, who was this homosexual in the closet, who was blackmailing almost everybody.

But that year, '53, I was living with William Burroughs in New York, and he was conceiving the first routines of Naked Lunch, which were parodies of Cold War bureaucracy mentality and police state mentality. And I remember that year very vividly, that Mosaddeq was overthrown in Iran, in Persia, because it was suspected that he might be neutral, or left, though he wasn't, but he really wanted to nationalize the oilfields, which the Shah later did anyway. And I remember the CIA overthrew Mosaddeq, and he wept in court; and we've had karmic troubles and war troubles with Iran ever since. That was the seed of all the Middle Eastern catastrophe we're facing now.

[At the] same time, in 1953, the Arbenz government in Guatemala was overthrown, and I was much aware of that, despite the neutrality of the American papers and the lack of real