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The Many Hats of Robert Altman: A Life in Cinema

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I am really sorry that I can't be in Ann Arbor when 'The Player' is being shown. As you know, I have a special place in my Psyche for your city.
- Robert Altman, 1992.

Welcome to the exhibit! You will see reproduced here a few of the abundance of rich archival resources that are in the Robert Altman Archive in the University of Michigan Special Collections Library. A life as full, a career as varied, a mind as creative as that of Robert Altman can only be hinted at in an exhibit such as this, but we hope it whets your appetite for more.

Robert Bernard Altman (1925-2006) was born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri, and maintained a soft spot for Midwestern directness throughout his life. When his career in the mainstream of the film industry was at an impasse in the early 1980's, he welcomed an invitation from the University of Michigan to come to Ann Arbor and direct an opera! He stayed to teach a course on his own films, and returned the next year to film *Secret Honor* on campus. Many of the friends he made in Ann Arbor became friends for life.

Robert Altman made films. He made films as a director, but he also had his own production companies and sometimes served as the producer or screenwriter for films. By working mainly outside the studio system he was able to control nearly every aspect of the films he made. After directing television shows for a time, his first major movie success was *M*A*S*H* in 1970. His last film was *A Prairie Home Companion* in 2006. In between there were picks and pans, ups and downs, but always the Altman touches in everything he did. Working apart from major studios and often within his own production companies also meant that he both accumulated and owned the records of his productions himself. Thank goodness he realized early on that it would be a good idea to hang on to these records.

The Robert Altman Archive was acquired by the University Library from the Robert Altman estate in early 2008. It contains all the working documents and objects created in the various offices, shooting locations, and soundstages on which Robert Altman worked during his career, and totals approximately 1,000 linear feet. This exhibit is meant to introduce the Altman Archive to the University of Michigan and a wider scholarly community, as well as to honor the work and lifetime of achievements of Robert Altman. The Archive is now open and available for use. Through using the archives, scholars will be able to understand Robert Altman's completed works better because they can analyze bits and pieces from his early years and material related to all his major films -- the early drafts, the abandoned ideas, the cut scenes, the departures from written script, the business negotiations, and the human relations that went into those works.

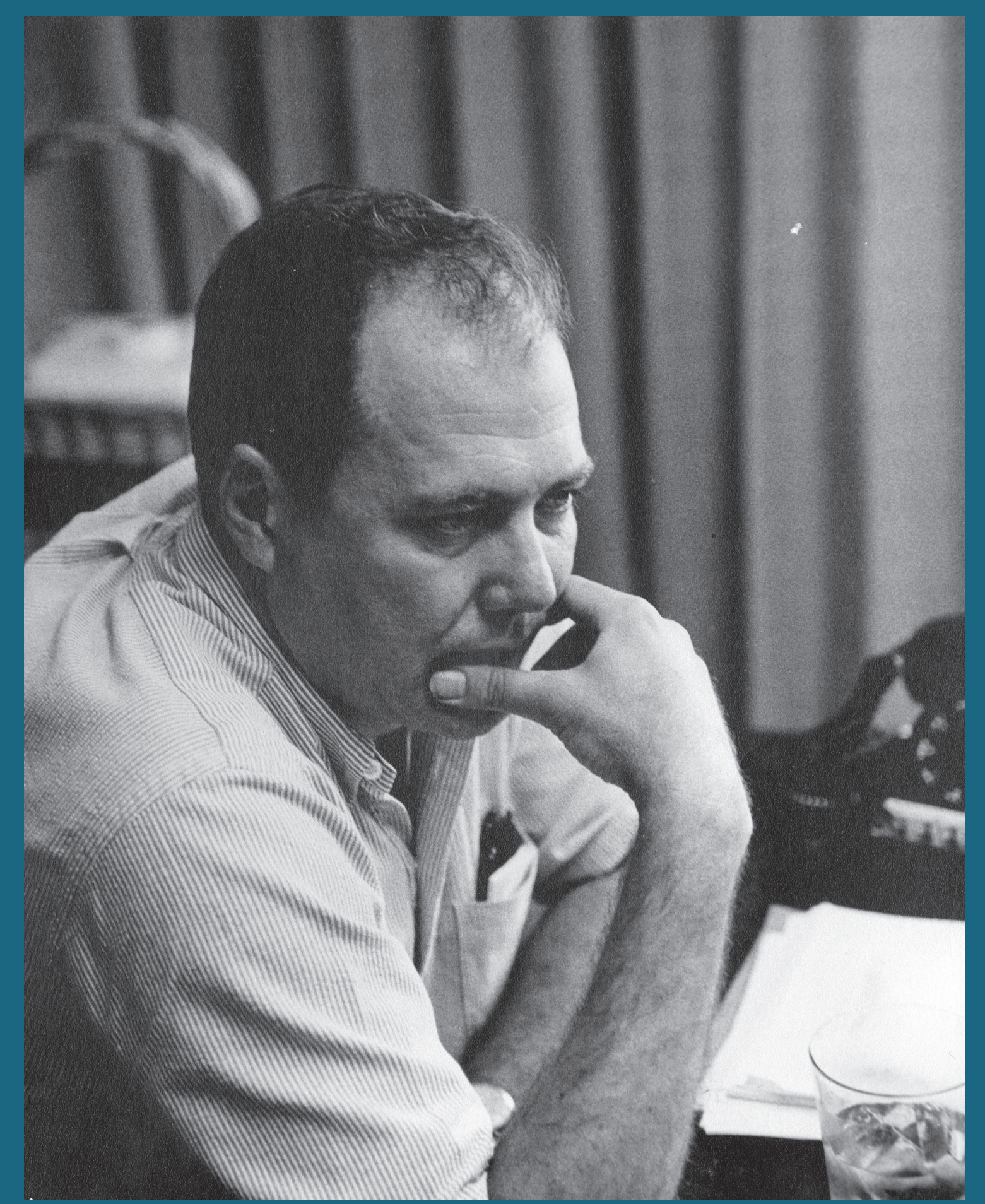
Robert Altman wasn't born in Michigan, didn't attend the University of Michigan, and never lived in Michigan, apart from a few months in the early 1980's. But he is inextricably linked to our state and to the University of Michigan because we have the privilege and honor of housing the Robert Altman Archive.



Photograph of Robert Altman as a young boy with his mother, Helen Altman.



Kathryn Reed Altman, ca. 1960.



Robert B. Altman, ca. 1960.