Today, Middlebury recognizes Ted Perry as a venerable scholar in one of the world’s most dynamic arts. But before he was old enough to be venerable, he says with a smile, he was just annoying. As a young faculty member in the 1970s, he was constantly petitioning administrators to support a film program—a rarity for liberal arts colleges in those days. “I had to be persistent,” he remembers. “They’d say no, and I’d go back again and again. Eventually they just said, ‘How do I get this guy out of my office?’”

Starting with literally nothing—no film courses, no equipment, no screening facility—Perry guided the development of an outstanding film and media culture department, where students balance the critical study of film and media with the creation of their own work, often within the same course. Classes incorporate numerous screenings of films, television programs, online videos, and other media texts, as well as hands-on lab sessions in state-of-the-art video-production facilities.

In the classroom, Ted Perry, who retired in 2012, was a quiet and pensive teacher, gently leading discussions of movies, their contexts, and their impact. He was “less of a lecturer and more of a storyteller,” according to film major Astri von Arbin Ahlander ’07. “Because he is so soft spoken, and nobody wanted to miss anything, students were always on the edge of their seats.”
A typical class involved the discussion of dozens of film excerpts, carefully selected and edited beforehand. Perry’s students learned how to read cinematic language, from editing choices to costume design. More important, he taught them to examine how those elements affect the viewers’ emotions or modify their perceptions.

“The bad films are those that reinforce values and ideas that we already have. The great films tell us more about who we are and stretch us,” Perry believes. Perhaps it’s not surprising, then, that he always challenged students to rethink how they relate to films. He urged them to react to the power of the moving image on a personal level and then integrate their impressions into their analysis.

This method has also guided his own scholarship: “Over the years, I’ve learned to trust my instincts. If there’s some moment in a film that sticks out in your mind or doesn’t make any sense to you, you need to figure out why it’s there, and then the rest of the film opens up.” Watching Antonioni’s L’eclisse in the 1960s, Perry had such an experience: a hole in the story haunted him and launched him on a lifelong inquiry into that director’s works. He has researched, published, and edited articles and books on Antonioni, as well as directors De Sica, Fellini, Eisenstein, and others.

Before coming to Vermont, Perry was a documentary filmmaker and director of film at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His position at Middlebury as the Fletcher Professor of the Arts allowed him to add to his body of work by staging plays at the College and elsewhere. He directed the Silberman Symposium on the Holocaust and Cinema and brought permanent video art installations by Bucky Schwartz to the Mahaney Center for the Arts. He has also brought guest lecturers from the world of film and film criticism to campus, including director Robert Wis, feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, and Belgian director Chantal Akerman.

“It’s important to create a moving-image culture at Middlebury,” Perry says. “When I came, there were no screenings in the evenings; now there are two or three a day. It’s just healthy. If you’re going to live in a world with all that media, it needs to be part of your education.”

### Ted’s Top Ten

1. *Godfather II* (Coppola)
2. *Dog Star Man* (Brakhage)
3. *Amarcord* (Fellini)
4. *L’age d’or* (Buñuel, Dali)
5. *Persona* (Bergman)
6. *Voyage to Italy* (Rossellini)
7. *Arnulf Rainer* (Kubelka)
8. *The Searchers* (Ford)
9. *Vampyr* (Dreyer)
10. *Au Hasard, Balthazar* (Bresson)

Throughout his career at Middlebury, Ted Perry says, the College provided funding that enabled him to pursue his research and enhance his teaching. “In those times when I really had something that I wanted to do on leave or needed funding for, the College really supported that,” he notes.

Now Middlebury aims to recognize Perry’s contributions by creating a faculty support fund in his honor. The fund would enable the next generation of outstanding faculty members to do research and creative work and bring that work into the classroom, enriching the student experience, just as Perry did.

The fund would provide start-up money for new faculty to purchase equipment needed in their research; cover the cost of hiring students to work on research projects; and underwrite the costs associated with researching, writing and publishing a book. It would fund trips to conferences where faculty members present papers, often with their student research assistants. And it would provide money to develop new courses and innovative teaching methods.