

# Ongoing Discussion “Thought Piece”

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February 2010

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for

Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne’s  
Enterprise Thinking Network

## ***Triumph of the Dream*** **Norman Seeff**

Photographer and filmmaker Norman Seeff has been exploring the inner dynamics of the creative process with thousands of the world's most successful innovators and creators for more than 3 decades.

Seeff's photographs are known for their intimacy and include many iconic images with the leading artists of their time. In more than 2000 photo shoots since 1969, he has worked with musical artists, film directors, authors, television personalities, scientists, visionaries and entrepreneurs. His film & tape archive of more than 400 of these sessions provides a unique insight of artists and innovators in the act of creation.

In 2003, Seeff was invited by Dr Charles Elachi, the Director of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, to observe the 2 Mars Rovers under construction in the vast clean rooms on the JPL campus.

As they walked back to Dr Elachi's office discussing the nature and challenges of the innovative process, Seeff was struck by the profound courage, conviction and commitment of the thousands of individuals engaged in this ambitious collective dream. He was inspired to discover whether the *Seven Stage Dynamic of the Creative Process*\* he had identified during 3 decades photographing and filming artists and innovators would apply equally to a collective vision of this scale. Six weeks later he was granted access to key scientists and engineers of the Mars Exploration Rover mission (MER) and began production on his documentary film ***Triumph of the Dream***.

***Triumph of the Dream*** is an odyssey into worlds normally hidden from view – the 'inner-space' dynamics of the creative process. The film's 'outer-space' journey is an emotionally riveting real-life drama of the human face of exploration of a courageous team of engineers and scientists willing to dream the impossible.

In early 2004, after a seven month journey, the MER team landed the two rovers *Spirit* and *Opportunity* on Mars. They had designed and built them in a record time of 3 years, against the backdrop of two humiliating failures. Intended to survive 90 days as a prerequisite of mission success, both Rovers continue to send invaluable data back to Earth 6 years later, superseding the wildest expectations of everyone concerned.

Over the last 6 months, multiple test screenings of ***Triumph of the Dream*** have been held for a wide ranging demographic. The response has been universally enthusiastic. Audiences have been inspired by ability of the JPL team to learn from their failures and find solutions to extraordinary problems. Feedback from these screenings illustrates that people of all ages have felt empowered by the film to deal with obstacles in their own lives and to do so, where possible, in a co-creative and collective way.

\* **Norman Seeff Productions**

***The Seven Stage Dynamic of the Creative Process***  
**Norman Seeff**



## Biography

Norman Seeff was born March 5, 1939 in Johannesburg, South Africa. Since moving to the United States in 1969, his work as a photographer and filmmaker has been focused on the exploration of human creativity and the inner dynamics of the creative process. He graduated with honors in science and art at King Edward VII School in Johannesburg. At the age of 17, he was drafted as the youngest player in the South African national soccer league.

Norman qualified as a medical doctor in 1965 and worked in emergency medicine for 3 years at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto focusing on the management of traumatic shock. In 1969, he immigrated to the United States to pursue his creative passions and artistic abilities.

Soon after arriving in New York, Seeff's photographs of the people he encountered on the streets of Manhattan were discovered by the famed graphic designer, Bob Cato. Cato introduced Seeff to the world of album cover design and his first major photographic assignment for The Band brought him immediate recognition. His early work also includes images of Robbie Robertson, Patti Smith, Robert Mapplethorpe, Andy Warhol as well as other New York personalities.

In 1971, Seeff spent a year as Professor of Photography at Bennington College in Vermont.

In 1972, on the recommendation of Cato, Seeff relocated to Los Angeles to become creative director of United Artists Records where his work in design and photography received multiple Grammy Award nominations.

Three years later, he opened an independent studio on Sunset Boulevard. His photographic sessions soon became legendary and attracted audiences of 30-40 at each session, swelling to over 200 on some occasions. A combination of actor's workshop and a celebration of creative spontaneity, Seeff's sessions were emotionally engaging experiences that resulted in many iconic images with leading artists and innovators of the time.

Norman's creative interaction with artists inspired him to film his sessions beginning with an Ike & Tina Turner session in 1975. Using the photo session as a vehicle for exploring the inner dynamics of the creative process with artists at work, Seeff has continued this process for over 3½ decades. His film and tape archive of more than 400 shoots with musical artists, film directors, authors, television personalities, scientists, visionaries and entrepreneurs provides a unique insight of artists and innovators in the act of creation.

In 1990, Norman applied the spontaneous and co-creative approach he had developed during his photo sessions to working with actors in [television commercials]. During the 90's, he became an acclaimed, award-winning director of 100s of national commercials for major brands including Apple, Levis, Glaxo, Nissan, Toyota, General Motors and Motorola. Seeff returned to photography and the documentation of his sessions in 2000 working with the stars of Paramount Television, a documentary exploration of the artist's journey for Paul Allen's Experience Music Project and Cal Tech's many Nobel Science Laureates.

It was the latter assignment that led to Seeff being invited to work with the NASA space explorers at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) and to the production of his documentary film ***Triumph of the Dream***.

Triumph of the Dream reveals the human face of the Mars Exploration mission that landed two rovers on Mars in 2004. In the film, Seeff uses the Seven Stage Dynamic of the Creative Process he developed in his photo sessions as the underlying narrative structure. Triumph of the Dream is scheduled for release in 2010 as a theatrical event featuring excerpts from Seeff's previously unreleased sessions archive and a round table discussion on creativity with leading artists.

Norman lives in Los Angeles with his wife Sue Kiel and works out of his studio in Burbank. He has two children. His daughter, Tai Power Seeff, is a photographer and his son Shane studies music and filmmaking at Cape Town University in South Africa.