



# EXIT

## THE RIGHT TO DIE

DIRECTED BY  
**Fernand Melgar**

PRODUCED BY  
**Fernand Melgar & Jean-Marc Henchoz**

**BEST DOCUMENTARY**  
2006 Swiss Cinema Awards

**BEST DOCUMENTARY**  
2005 Namur Int'l Film Festival

**OFFICIAL SELECTION**  
2006 Full Frame Doc Film Festival

75 minutes / color / 2005  
Stereo / French with English Subtitles

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## Synopsis

No one knows the day or hour of one's death, and most of us hope ours will be quick and painless. But when incurable illness strikes—accompanied by extreme pain, physical incapacity, and reduced quality of life—one is confronted with difficult questions about how to spare oneself, as well as family members and loved ones, the long, slow, drawn-out agony of our ultimate demise. Social taboos about death have generated legal, medical, and ethical prohibitions against voluntary euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide.

Switzerland is presently the only country in the world where suicide assistance is legal. EXIT: THE RIGHT TO DIE profiles that nation's EXIT organization, which for over twenty years has provided volunteers who counsel and accompany the terminally-ill and severely handicapped towards a death of their choice. The film reveals intimate conversations between terminally-ill patients, family members and EXIT escorts, visits an annual membership meeting, an international conference, an EXIT staff meeting and frank conversations between its volunteers about the personal emotional toll of their work.

EXIT also profiles several of the organization's officers as well as its members, and follows one incurable woman's dilemma to its emotionally devastating conclusion, witnessing the deliberate and exacting discussions between doctor and patient leading up to a final decision, and the medical procedures involved in her "self-deliverance." This remarkable documentary illuminates the many sensitive issues surrounding this controversial social issue, and, in chronicling several real-life stories, confronts us with the question why, when necessary, choosing the means and time of one's own death should be denied.



### **Director's Statement**

It is through the extraordinary precision of his shots and their division in time and space describing the links between the characters of the film, that Fernand Melgar succeeds in clarifying the reasons and procedures by which human beings decide to break the bonds that hold them to life. The challenge is intimidating for it is a matter of approaching, with their agreement and without distorting their behaviour, people who act and think on the margins of communal morality. The film EXIT, from the name of the Association for the right to die in dignity, an association founded in 1980 in French-speaking Switzerland and which now has 10,000 members from the ages of 21 to 103, describes the activities of those voluntary workers who accompany up until the moment of their death people exhausted by and no longer willing to endure their illnesses and suffering.

Two types of pictures give this story of reality the dimension of initiation, to which a sequence filmed in Japan confers a widened cultural and moral horizon. There are fluid shots that follow the movements of conversations and bodies. They decipher the pressing needs for complicity and compassion on the part of those whose calling is to carry out the gestures that lead to death. The sequence of a walk by the two accompanying voluntary workers in a landscape of mist and ghostly trees is astounding, and haunting. The film maker and his chief cameraman manage to capture between the words and pauses of their conversation the universal preoccupations linked to life and death. Suspended in an imaginary territory through which memory moves back and forth between the two shores, this moment defines the controlled rhythm of the story which never jolts or shocks the viewer.

Then there are static shots framed and filmed with almost mathematical precision, sketching in depth the structures of a world of annual general meetings, committee meetings and sessions in an office, in which we see and hear about the rules, procedures, postures and techniques characteristic of the participants in Exit. The great merit of the film lies in simultaneously establishing the proximity of the sympathetic approach and the distance from an ethnographical point of view, which give a moral stature, made up of aesthetic choices and fascinating narrative right up to the last minute and to the extreme limit which the film can risk capturing.

## Filmmaker Biography



Fernand Melgar was born in 1961 in Tangier, Morocco. A self-taught producer, director and editor of documentaries since 1985, he is of Spanish origin, and has lived in Lausanne since 1963

### FILMOGRAPHIE (sélection)

[EXIT](#) 2005, doc., 85', sur l'assistance au suicide en Suisse. Sortie en salle de cinéma en septembre 2005.

□ ["J"](#) 2003, doc., 15', sur l'antisémitisme pendant la mobilisation en Suisse. □

[À l'arrière](#) 2003, coréalisation avec Grégoire Mayor, doc., 15'. sur la vie des femmes pendant la mobilisation en Suisse. □

[A table](#) 2003, coréalisation avec Grégoire Mayor, doc., 15', sur les problèmes d'alimentation pendant la mobilisation en Suisse. □

[Remue-ménage](#) 2002, doc., 60' sur Pascal, 35 ans, père de famille, a choisi de s'habiller en femme, au vu de tous. □

[Collection PREMIER JOUR](#) coproduite avec JMH pour ARTE et la Télévision Suisse Romande, sortie en salle de cinéma. □

[Classe d'accueil](#) 1998, doc., 56', sur l'intégration de jeunes étrangers en Suisse. □ [Les frissons du hasard](#) 1997, doc., 15' participation avec "Fous du jeu" sur la ludopathie en Espagne.

[Lorsque mon heure viendra](#) 1995, doc., 55min. réalisation collective Climage, participation avec "Malika" sur le deuil pathologique.

[Album de famille](#) 1993, doc., 56', sur l'émigration d'une famille espagnole venue s'établir en Suisse dans les années 60.

## Credits

**réalisation** FERNAND MELGAR

**image** CAMILLE COTTAGNOUD, STEFAN BOSSERT

**son** BLAISE GABIOUD

**montage** KARINE SUDAN

**étalonnage** PETER GUYER

**montage son** PHILIPPE JACQUET

**mixage** DENIS SÉCHAUD

**production déléguée** FERNAND MELGAR, JEAN-MARC ET MATTHIEU HENCHOZ

**production exécutive** FLORENCE ADAM

**en coproduction avec** IRENE CHALLAND, Unité documentaire de la Télévision Suisse Romande, LUISELLA REALINI, Télévision Suisse Italienne, entreprises SRG SSR idée suisse,

**en association avec** ARTE France, unité de Programmes Documentaire Thierry Garrel, Pierrette Ominetti et YLE TV2 documentaries, Finlande

**avec l'appui de** Swiss-Finnish Point une initiative de Visions du Réel Nyon, Gabriela Bussmann et AVEK Helsinki, Timo Humaloja

**avec la participation de** MICHELINE, MAGALI, Dr JÉRÔME SOBEL, JACQUELINE ALBERT, ELISABETH LERESCHE, MARIANNE TENDON, BERNARD ET PIERRETTE PERRET, SYLVIA GAILLARD, CHRISTIANE STANDLEY, DR JEAN STRASSER, DOMINIQUE ROETHLISBERGER, DR PIERRE AXEL RUCHTI, DENISE VOSER, SERGE DERUNGS, ASTRID NAVARRO, JOCELYNE, EMILIO COVERI, FRANCES COOMBE, DENISE SOBEL, DEREK HUMPHRY, JURG KROMPHOLZ, PHILIPPE DEKENS, JACQUELINE LOUP, Me CLAUDE NARBEL, JEAN-JACQUES BISE, DR ERIC BREUSS

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