Chapter 5

Patterns of Duality – Between/Beyond Dada and Surrealism: Man Ray’s *Emak Bakia* (1926)

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One of the most interesting aspects of the artist Man Ray is the overriding presence of duality in his life as well as in his work. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, he was constantly balancing one thing with another: an American of Russian heritage living in Paris; painter and photographer; Dada and Surrealist. In California during the 1940s, his decision to grow a beard was apparently met with mixed opinion, some liking and others disliking the way it looked. In direct response to this divide, he shaved one side of his face, leaving the beard intact on the other. “Un côté avec barbe pour ceux qui préféraient avec. Un côté sans, pour ceux qui préféraient sans”, he stated (Bourgeade 2002: 32). Placing a mirror down the centre of his face, he allowed himself to be seen alternately in two different versions. This anecdote is important to our conception of Man Ray since it functions as a concrete manifestation of his divided self and his desire to be more than one thing at any time. It also gives us a sense of his idiosyncratic personality and his refusal to commit to any one camp, appearing to belong to both by carving out a unique position between them.

Nowhere is this more evident than in his participation in the movements of Dada and Surrealism and through the incorporation and interpretation within his work of the principles related to those movements. When Man Ray exhibited in the first Surrealist exhibition in 1925, he simply re-presented many of the objects, paintings and photographs that had already been shown in his Dada exhibition a few years earlier, demonstrating an important element of inter-
changeability between them. The present discussion explores this phenomenon from the perspective of Man Ray’s film, *Emak Bakia* and attempts to understand its difficult positioning between the movements of Dada and Surrealism. It places particular attention on the way in which duality is actually woven into the fabric of the film, existing not simply in the simultaneous presence of Dada and Surrealism as influencing factors, but as a crucial element of Man Ray’s exploration of the medium. In other words, it will argue that, although *Emak Bakia* is situated at the crossroads of Dada and Surrealist expression, Man Ray uses this interrelationship as a springboard for the exploration of his own obsessions related to cinematic vision and structure. Through this investigation, an awareness of the way *Emak Bakia* is simultaneously between and beyond Dada and Surrealism will emerge.

Although Man Ray’s participation in the Dada and Surrealist movements is most frequently assessed through his two principle activities at the time – photography and collage (or object-creations), his work in film offers an equally valuable perspective on the nature of this participation. Despite his apparent decision to “ne jamais m’occuper du cinéma, sauf comme spectateur de temps en temps” (Bourgeade 2002: 49), Man Ray made four short films during the 1920s: *Le Retour à la raison* (1923), *Emak Bakia* (1926), *L’Étoile de mer* (1928) and *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* (1929). These now canonical avant-garde works provide an excellent context in which to study his relationship to Dada and Surrealism, since they are often understood as demonstrating a trajectory from one mode of expression to another, in a way that would seem to reflect the historical development of the movements. Yet, they are also extremely complex and evade straightforward categorisation. As Arturo Schwarz (1977: 286) has noted:

> It is hard to classify Man Ray’s films; they are provocative in their originality and pioneering in their content […] they are products of his deep-rooted individuality and independence. His films anticipated moods and modes. It may be said that they are the most Dada of the Surrealist films, the most Surrealist of the Dada films.

This comment provides a starting point for an investigation into the way Man Ray’s cinema creates a dialogue between Dada and Surrealism, whilst expressing a unique and idiosyncratic approach to