

Alice in the Cities (1974)

*Alice in the Cities* is a magnificent and wondrous road film about a German writer named Philip who is asked to look after a stranger's daughter for some time; not realizing he will be looking after her much longer than he expected. Even though this film follows the simple road scenario of two strangers stuck with one another and in time slowly bonding and becoming closer to each other; it never feels formulaic or over emotional. The black and white cinematography gives the film an added poetic power because I believe it gives the viewer the look of the bleak and lonely world that Philip inhabits. In a lot of the road films we have been watching these last couple of weeks, every character viewed the world much differently. In *Easy Rider* the bikers viewed the world as hostile and threatening, in *Two-Lane Blacktop* the drivers viewed the world through the identities of the vehicles they drove and now in *Alice in the Cities*, Philip views the world through the lens of his camera. And yet he seems even more disappointed when looking at the results of the photos he takes saying, "They never really show what you saw."

The character of Philip is sort of an enigma but in one of the most important scenes of the film he visits an old lover of his as he tells her how he has lost touch with the world. She says to him, "You did that long ago. You don't have to travel to America for that. You lost touch when

you lost your sense of identity. That's why you always need proof. Proof that you still exist. You treat your stories and your experiences like raw eggs. And that's why you keep taking those photos. For further proof that it was really you who saw something." Philip has been sent to America for a job to write a piece for a magazine but it seems he has gotten writers block. The story he is writing about is about the American scene and what he sees through his camera are signs and images which he believes are important for the story he is writing.

Ian Garwood makes many interesting points on how the director Wim Wenders uses music as the heart of his films. There are several key scenes where the director uses the music as a way of expressing what Philip is seeing. The most memorable scene is where he attends a Chuck Berry concert and you can see his character being totally immersed within the musical atmosphere. Music and TV seem to be a very crucial part of his character who lives in a sad world of isolation. He even complains to himself in his vehicle while listening to the radio on how he's never allowed to hear the end of a song; or when he can't get a good TV reception in a hotel room, he angrily breaks the television set. There also an interesting scene in the film where Philip is on a beach taking a picture of a wooden like object. He starts to sing the song Under the Boardwalk as he lines the multiple photos of the same object next to one another. These photos I believe truly capture what he believes is his salvation and happiness which is an interesting contrast to a beautiful reality that he clearly cannot see. The beauty he sees in those photos slowly start to blend in with his reality when he becomes a part of young Alice's life.

When he first takes care of Alice, it is more a simple friendly gesture. When Alice's mother doesn't seem to return he decides to take young Alice along with him on the road to help her reunite with her. During this time the two bicker and complain but generally seem to like one another and not mind each other's company. Philip loves taking photos and seems to love his

camera, (which is something he would never sell even being completely broke.) And yet during his road trip with Alice and being there for her through her frightening and sad times of dealing with the idea of her mother potentially abandoning her; he clearly does not seem the need to use his camera any longer. The beauty of life and of Philip's identity he so desperately has been searching for has finally been found living through young Alice and she seems to also feel the same way about him; looking at him like a father she never clearly had. I greatly felt for the character of Philip because of my strong passion for art films. I keep searching for the beauties and answers of life through the films I witness and I am arrogantly blinded by the beauties of reality that pass me by every day. *Alice in the Cities* is a touching and extraordinary experience about a man who finally finds the answers he has been so long looking for through the innocence of a small child. This is a magical film.