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Golden Globe Winner Best New
Kathleen Kramer (*Bunny Sledge*). Gilbert Hunt, Mark Brown, Burt Brown. 2,521 ft. 70 mins. (16 mm.).

Los Angeles. Before embarking on an enquiry into the murder of actress Gloria Franklin, private eye Frank Goya, a disorganised young man with a Polaroid camera, explains that he sees himself as a student whose function is to take notes and make sense of facts. A voice recites facts about the city during an aerial sequence. In a TV advertisement, Gloria's husband Pierce Del Rue walks along a beach and benevolently explains the workings of Rexon, the many-branched corporation of which he is president. Del Rue's lawyer fields journalists' questions with a statement that Goya has been hired to establish the facts. We hear more statistics of the city during a ride down the freeways. Goya visits a bar which Gloria formerly frequented; we see Gloria doing a screen-test for a part in the remake of *Triumph of the Will* (she becomes increasingly befuddled by a long monologue, part of which concerns Leni Riefenstahl's overriding interest in film form). On his way to Bel Air to interview Del Rue's mistress Bunny Sledge, Goya lectures the audience on the redistribution of wealth. His conversation with Bunny is interrupted by a close-up of lips being smeared with lipstick while a voice explains a new advertising campaign for the film of that name. Later, after Bunny has been murdered, Goya tells the audience that Del Rue had Gloria murdered because she stood in the way of his immense financial interests in the movie industry; and Bunny was killed because she had secretly taped conversations with Del Rue. Confronted with his crimes, Del Rue attempts unsuccessfully to bribe Goya—the latter subsequently escapes from Del Rue's men by running out of the frame: the camera pulls back to reveal that the thugs are actors in a film.

Structured in sections, the first number '12' and the last '1' (followed by the words 'wholeness start'), *Angel City* is in less explicit ways a consciously back-to-front movie: a 'thriller' without a satisfactorily concluded plot (if, indeed, it can be said to have a plot at all), the vehicle for a bumbling hero who looks and behaves more like an ageing hippy than a sharp private eye (with a red socialist shirt hanging out of his trousers, the lackadaisical Goya is given to slangy, rhetorical assertions, throwaway political comments and oblique observations which seem to have little to do with the case in hand). Despite its moments of self-consciousness (a bar scene is inserted simply, it seems, because it is a received truth that thrillers require bar scenes), the film finally establishes itself as a quirky, original work, although one overloaded with jumbled ideas and half-digested political notions. Jon Jost, the director of several political shorts and two other features (*Speaking Directly* and *Last Chants for a Slow Dance*), has claimed not to have seen any movies before he began making them himself in the early Sixties: here, however, he reveals an interest in form almost as great as that with which he credits Riefenstahl. Praised by Godard ("He is not a traitor to the movies, like almost all American directors. He makes them move"), Jost has made *Angel City* a bluntly didactic work (the interconnection of crime and capitalism) which aims at consistently reversing audience expectations—and in so doing manages a number of witty and amusing asides. It is in his attempt to find new (and economical) ways of approaching tired problems that Jost is at his most effective: the sinister evocation of Los Angeles by the relatively simple device of a long unbroken aerial shot and a monotonous but fascinating set of statistics; the introduction to the 'murderer' by way of a plausible TV commercial which has Del Rue walking along a beach and carefully explaining why large corporations are both good and necessary (this sequence ends with the legend "One World" across an animated globe being embraced by a dinosaur). Similarly, when Goya goes to fashionable Bel Air for the important interview with his only witness, the camera, instead of following him into the house (which is anyway the wrong one) casually pulls away from the departing detective and slowly pans to reveal three Mexicans working in the garden: the audience, anxious to know what has happened to Gloria, is teased into expecting an explanation but is instead compelled to contemplate the workmen. The film is, unfortunately, almost fatally flawed by its diffuseness—letters inexplicably flashing across the screen, tricky optical effects (Goya at one point takes apart and reassembles the screen in the form of a jigsaw puzzle), random, frequently arresting images (swaying palms, a high shot of a figure walking across a beach) which seem to add up to nothing—as well as by the solemn narrator's rather tiresome pseudo-poeticism ("What is this place? Who are these people?" he asks at the end of the film). Despite these shortcomings, however, Jost's solid achievement remains that, on the slim budget of less than \$6,000, he has managed to conjure an original vision of a rapacious, vital city which seems to him as firmly in the grip of men like Del Rue as the globe in his company's advertisement is in the grasp of the monolithic dinosaur.