



Verna Bloom in a scene from "Medium Cool."

The media cool it

Films reviewed by DEREK MALCOLM

IT would have been surprising if the Democratic Convention in Chicago had not attracted the attention of filmmakers attempting to feel the pulse of America during one of its worst sicknesses, just as the Kennedy and Luther King murders did. But it would be a mistake for anyone to think that the two movies on this theme which arrived in London this week are merely stale accessories after the fact.

Haskell Wexler's **Medium Cool** (Academy Two) is the more obvious candidate for attention, since Robin Spry, the young Canadian director of **Prologue** (Paris-Pullman), has taken a smaller microcosm of America to work on and has made his film with less pretensions in the way of style and money expended.

Wexler, one of Hollywood's most accomplished cameramen (he won an Oscar for "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"), has almost bitten off more than he can chew in his first picture as director. Almost, but not quite, since his fictional story is as beautifully played as his factual material is stunning because it's there at all.

His thesis is that America is wounded by violence and further numbed by its instant exposure on television. The most becalmed of all are the media men themselves who use the excuse that they are "just doing their job" to smother any meaningful involvement. His protagonist is a press photographer (Robert Forster) whose experience first of the Negro ghetto and then the Chicago riots turns him from one kind of person into another.

It might seem just too much that he gets involved as well with a young widow struggling to bring up her son in the Appalachian ghetto. But here the playing saves what could have been a banal sop to a different kind of public. Verna Bloom, as the widow

and Harold Blankenship as her son are both marvellous.

The film's real importance, though, lies not in the photographer's progress but what is happening around him to America. The riots are there (Wexler himself was badly gassed by National Guardsmen), the ghetto is there, Mayor Daley's police are there. So is "the cool medium" (the phrase is McLuhan's and refers of course to television). The film is not always sure of its effects. But it contains within it the questions we should all be asking now and must be seen by anyone who cares at all.

"Prologue" is really an argument about how the young should attempt to answer these questions. Its title suggests a beginning, and Spry postulates revolution. But what revolution? The film begins just before the Czech debacle and ends with Chicago. Jesse (John Robb) is an activist, committed to confrontation. His girl-friend, Karen (Elaine Malus), gets involved with David (Gary Rader) who just wants to live the beautiful life.

The argument weaves gently, and quite convincingly, about the characters—though there are more traumatic episodes such as Jesse gets beaten up selling his underground paper and fights a losing battle to gain redress through the courts. We are allowed to see very clearly the alternatives facing those who cannot stomach society as it is. The film is quite artless but honest and honourable to its intentions. It's one of the few of its kind one can really like.

Claude Lelouch's **Life Love Death** (Cameo Poly) is not quite as portentous-sounding as its title. In fact it is the first by this swinging smartpant of a director that hasn't made me want to stamp on his camera. Has he finally taken us all to heart?

It tells the story of a police watch

on the murderer of three prostitutes, the man's eventual arrest, his trial and beheading. The first half is a tightly constructed thriller, the second a masked plea for the abolition of capital punishment. Neither is exactly brilliant, though as usual Lelouch's technical proficiency is never in doubt.

But the final passages are indeed remarkable, as the man waits for death and then is dragged, limp-legged and hysterical, to the place of execution. This is what it really must be like, not only to be a murderer, but to be murdered in return. If only M. Lelouch had told us more about his man and less about his colour filters, we might have had a film and a half. With Amidou as the murderer, Caroline Cellier, Janine Magnan, and Marcel Bozzuffi.

More (Cameo Victoria) follows the progress from Germany to Ibiza of a young German student, obsessed with an American girl who takes drugs. She introduces him first to hash, then heroin and finally LSD. He dies, thus demonstrating that the more the merrier is not a useful adage where blowing the mind is concerned.

It sounds awful, but it's not really that bad in spite of a heavy script and a tone which tries desperately hard to be moral and modern at the same time. Barbet Schroeder is the young director, and Klaus Grunberg and Mimsy Farmer play the leads. Mimsy is frequently laid bare before us and that's nice. But Ibiza, well photographed in colour, ravishes the eye even more.

"GOODBYE MR CHIPS"—MGM point out, in reference to an article by Wayne Warga in the "Guardian" on Saturday, that "Goodbye Mr Chips" is not being cut in Britain and audiences can see it with all the music intact.