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Plus ça change? Translating William Gibson into Polish: "The Gernsback Continuum" and *The Peripheral*

Abstract: This article has been inspired by the most recent Polish edition of William Gibson's 1986 collection of short stories *Burning Chrome*. By focusing on the new Polish translation of one of Gibson's earliest tales, "The Gernsback Continuum," and juxtaposing it with the Polish version of his latest novel, *The Peripheral*, I intend to comment on the reception of his prose (both by the source culture and the target culture readers) and its translatability. Apart from the idiosyncratic aspects of Gibson's work in general, various extraliterary factors will also be taken into account in order to elucidate the context in which Polish translations of his works continue to be created, distributed and assessed.[1]

Keywords: literary translation, science fiction, foreignization, domestication, mistranslation, reader, alienating effect

William Gibson's prose entered the Polish literary market in 1990, when a small scale sf, fantasy and horror magazine *Fenix* published Krzysztof Sokołowski's translation of "Dogfight,"[2] a short story co-written with Michael Swanwick and later included in the *Burning Chrome* anthology. With the exception of *Zero History*, all of Gibson's novels were translated into Polish, but, as with many other cultural transfers in the formerly communist Poland, there was a significant delay as regards the first Polish edition of *Neuromancer* (1992, trans. by Piotr Cholewa), and the first Polish edition of Gibson's short stories was released in 1996, i.e. ten years later than the original. Curiously enough, Zysk i S-ka, the editing house responsible for the Polish version of Gibson's tales, published it under the title *Johnny Mnemonic* (with Katarzyna Karłowska, Piotr Cholewa and Krzysztof Sokołowski as translators), most likely in order to capitalize on the fact that the eponymously titled short story in the collection had by then been adapted into a mainstream feature film. However, in what follows I will be making references only to the most recently published Polish translations of Gibson's writings, namely his latest novel, *Peripheral* (*Peryferal*—2016, translation by Krzysztof Sokołowski) and "The Gernsback Continuum" ("Kontinuum Gernsbacka," whose first translator was Katarzyna Karłowska), one of the ten stories in the *Burning Chrome* collection (its new Polish edition was published in 2018, this time with

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1   This article contains revised sections from two Gibson-related articles I published in 2002 and 2017 (mostly some examples of mis/translating *The Peripheral*). For detailed information see the Works Cited section.

2   http://encyklopediafantastyki.pl/index.php/Johnny_Mnemonic.

a more faithful title, *Wypalić chrom*, and with Piotr Cholewa as the translator of all of the stories).

It is important to emphasize that the present article deals only with a few selected examples and does not aim to offer an exhaustive inventory of the decisions made by the above-mentioned translators. Rather, the following brief remarks are intended to capture and contextualize some of the most conspicuous methods and tendencies as regards translating Gibson into Polish nowadays, however questionable or unsatisfactory they might seem. Undoubtedly, the passage of almost thirty years since Gibson's debut in Poland encourages generalizations concerning the peculiar features of his literary works and their Polish translations. For instance, a tentative, perhaps naive assumption could be made that the growing familiarity with Gibson's literary oeuvre in the course of the past few decades should have had a positive impact on the quality of the Polish translations of his short stories and novels. Other points worth mentioning include the changes in the linguistic norms of the target culture (e.g., the ever-increasing tolerance for slang and obscene words and the rather troubling readiness to let in borrowings from English: two most striking phenomena as regards the written and spoken Polish in the 1990s); the professional reputation of Cholewa and Sokołowski (both are experienced, respected literary translators and they both translated a lot of science fiction, hence it has always been tempting to lend support to at least some of their inconsistent choices); selected socioeconomic aspects of the book industry in Poland, especially the fact that book distribution had been "controlled by a handful of retail monopolists" (Rychlewski 197); the niche status of genre fiction; poorly coordinated editing process in many publishing houses, etc.

Most relevantly, perhaps, the genre of the translated works should count as one of the principal factors as regards the quality and reception of the given author's work. In the 1990s Gibson was identified and marketed predominantly as a cyberpunk writer/visionary. Cyberpunk, a subgenre of science fiction focusing "on the effects on society and individuals of advanced computer technology, artificial intelligence and bionic implants in an increasingly global culture, especially as seen in the struggles of streetwise, disaffected characters" (Prucher 30), relied on IT lingo and "insanely baroque" (Staggs) plotlines and settings. Its cryptic nature was taken for granted, perceived as an inextricable part of the demanding, somewhat alienating reading experience, while the parameters of the technologically advanced, socially transformed near-future left plenty of space for artistic experiments and innovative use of words. Gibson's refusal to make his story-telling more readable/accessible/elegant (Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska "Approaching" 437) may have contributed to the readers' expectations towards the translations of his novels. However, the publication of *Pattern Recognition*, set in the contemporary, resolutely non-futuristic world, modified this line of reasoning. The post 9/11 malaise depicted in the novel may have struck a more familiar chord, but even though the novel lacked the cyberpunk provenance, Gibson's writing method remained confusing. To complicate issues even more, 2014 saw Gibson's return to his science fiction roots. With its peculiar concept

of time travel, postapocalyptic landscapes and two futures, *The Peripheral* sounded very much like science fiction squared. Between "The Gernsback Continuum," "Gibson's first metafictional consideration of science fiction and its effects" (Westfahl 33; cf Lucas), but with a satirical thrust, and the latest, more grounded dystopia, the writer seems to have come full circle.

The blurb on the back cover of *Wypalić chrom* exemplifies several problems with the perception of Gibson as a writer and public figure in Poland. He is termed "the most influential S-F author of our times" and the ten stories included in the collection are described as wonderful, innovative and gripping. The authors of the promotional text also claim that "[i]n the year 2018 Gibson remains an unquestionable guru, prophet and spokesman for the new cybernetic order and virtual reality"—an anachronistic throwback to the 1980s and 1990s, whose cyberspace-friendly enthusiasm stands in stark contrast with the present zeitgeist and the ongoing reappraisal of the writer's arguably most seminal work, *Neuromancer*.

Though phrased awkwardly and somewhat nonsensically, nevertheless the 2018 blurb draws attention to how the readers might be looking at those stories now, with the benefit (or, indeed, curse) of hindsight. More importantly, at least from the point of view of this article, it also briefly comments on the quality of his prose: apparently, it is "laconic, [it] dazzles [literally, 'glitters'] with catchy phrases and expressions which enter [sic] our lexicon for many years to come." Quite apart from the confusing time frame, the blurb message to the prospective readers (including translators, arguably the most attentive reader category) could not be more clear: they should be prepared for a truly challenging experience and count their blessings.

"The writing style is killing me,"[3] or, Prosaic Matters

Gibson's prose has always attracted more attention because of its subject matter, rather than its stylistic features. Larry McCaffery's oft-quoted comment about *Neuromancer* being "[d]ense, kaleidoscopic, fast-paced, and full of punked-out, high-tech weirdo's" and its reliance on the "use of quick-fire stream of dissociated images" (217-218) might serve as a fairly accurate description of all of his writings, although the bullet point-like phrasing certainly downplays their less endearing qualities. Relatively few critics and scholars would share Ned Beauman's unfettered enthusiasm for Gibson as a topical writer *and* a refined stylist:

> Gibson presents you with something new—a technology, a garment,
> a building, a scheme, an expertise, a power structure—and this new thing
> is burnished with so much imagination and lyricism and attention to detail,

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3   This is a direct quote from the post by trytoholdon in the book section of *reddit.com*, published sometime in 2014 and titled "Neuromancer: anyone else find it difficult to follow?" The 29 responses it generated contain most of the objections typically raised against Gibson's writing style and storytelling techniques. See https://www.reddit.com/r/books/comments/1xv5bu/neuromancer_anyone_else_find_it_difficult_to/.

and so much of the noir and the gothic and the postmodern all at once, that it's electrifyingly exciting just to contemplate.

What Beauman found appealing and extra cool about *The Peripheral* and Gibson's earlier works, others have deemed mannered, boring in its repetitiveness, showy and shallow. In retrospect, it has also been easier to reexamine even those novels which were universally praised and considered most resonant back in the day. For instance, in the past few years, both professional critics and the so-called ordinary readers leaving comments on webpages such as goodreads.com or amazon.com have voiced their disappointment with Gibson's debut novel: in their opinion it did not age well and the sprawling, muddled story with multiple threads and scenes which were difficult to visualize caused particularly strong irritation because it forced them to constantly reread some of the passages. Needless to say, the publication of *The Peripheral* only confirmed the existence of those "timeless" flaws and raised similar objections.

In a 2013 compendium devoted to the writer, Gary Westfahl confirmed the commonly held view of Gibson's prose: "his distinctive style makes his work difficult to understand" (84). Westfahl even went as far as to suggest the most sensible strategy for dealing with unclear passages: "continue reading in the hopes that later passages will provide more illumination… a technique known to experienced science fiction readers, who realize that writers often begin stories by withholding information that gradually becomes clear by means of scattered references or infodumps" (85). Naturally, one would have to question the very idea that the gradual reveal Westfahl mentions is somehow more typical of science fiction than of any other genre (modernist writers would have certainly found it amusing), but the quote extract offers an apt summary of Gibson's method.

The problems with making sense of Gibson's prose often begin at the basic level of syntax and his chaotic use of pronouns and nominal sentences. The following comment from an exasperated source culture reader illustrates the prevailing sentiment quite vividly:

> My comment on style: Why do you want to make us work so hard trying to figure out who you are talking about? Way too many pronouns "—he, she… sometimes I did not figure it out, even after multiple readings and much thought. Using names would have helped a lot! I'd rather use my brain- power thinking about concepts and plot twists, rather than wasting it trying to figure out who is being discussed… I don't see how "pronoun identity confusion" makes me more of an interactive reader; it's not like trying to figure out a mystery, or envisioning advanced concepts (as Gibson does present in all of his books).[4]

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4   Yonah [pseud]. "Inconsistencies & Style Comment." *William Gibson Board*. 8 Dec. 2014. Web. 17 June 2018. http://www.williamgibsonboard.com/topic/inconsistencies-and-style-comment.

Although the above posting referred to *The Peripheral*, it reflects the perennial issue with Gibson's demanding prose. In short, it is not reader-friendly. It requires constant focus because even a seemingly unimportant detail might turn out to be meaningful in the course of the next hundred pages or so. As has already been stated, disgruntled readers often resent having to reread some passages in order to make sense of the given story. The usually slow unveiling of the context in which things are happening can strain the patience of even the most ardent fans of the writer, both native and non-native (cf Drabik, Norek, and numerous other Polish bloggers/journalists who reviewed Gibson's latest novel). Piecing together the available information is made even more difficult because of his enigmatic dialogues, bizarre metaphors, understatements and multi-layered intertextual references.

As regards the literary qualities of Gibson's writing, Jim Elkins's review of *The Peripheral* is perhaps most incisive since it articulates legitimate objections against the author's creative shortcuts:

> [M]ost of the book needs to be read slowly because of what he's doing to language. His observations, dialogue, descriptions, and metaphors are often thoughtful and persuasive... At the same time, however, he seems to feel as if serious writing can often best be achieved by neologisms. Inventive language... defamiliarizes. Gibson's does too, but mainly by inventing things that don't exist... The language of *The Peripheral* is a concerted attempt to 'cloak' ordinary writing in a veneer of micro-metaphors, translucent to ordinary meaning but safe from it... [I]t is a misunderstanding to think that language itself can't be interesting unless it is injected with nanobots of unfamiliarity.

Additionally, apart from the peculiar rhythm of Gibson's prose, whereby laconic, matter-of-fact descriptions are interspersed with poetic metaphors, the rendition of his work in the Polish language is further compounded by the use of complex, basically untranslatable neologisms. In short, failure *is* an option. Distortion of the already "difficult" original is inevitable. Gibson's texts tend to resist both the source and the target culture readers, but ultimately it is the latter group that is bound to have a more alienating reading experience.

Trans(a)l(ien)ation: Theories

Taking into account popular translation theory paradigms, there is nothing particularly unusual about the fate of Gibson's texts once they are translated into a foreign language. The binary oppositions of otherness and familiarity, foreignizing and domesticating, getting closer to the reader and forcing the reader to get closer to the text, have been neatly wrapped up by Lawrence Venuti in his attempt at defining the essence and the goals of translation. Put simply, for Venuti, translation is always a form of textual abuse/violence:

> the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the for-
> eign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader...
> The aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the
> recognizable, even the familiar; and this aim always risks a wholesale
> domestication of the foreign text, often in highly self-conscious projects,
> where translation serves an imperialist appropriation of foreign cultures for
> domestic agendas, cultural, economic, political. (209)

By equating domestication with violence and emphasizing the ideological ramifications of producing too fluent translations, he wholeheartedly embraces deliberately "disruptive" (Kwieciński 30) texts and alienating reading experiences. His insistence on the value of immersion in otherness and Antoine Berman's advocacy of literalism (297) are a form of sustained criticism against texts which are easier to understand and more polished or "elegant" than their original versions. However, the dichotomy espoused by Venuti seems less pertinent in situations when the target culture receives and domesticates an artefact from a more influential source culture (cf Milton 457). In addition, it tends to ignore or downplay the mediating role of translation and the "countless instances in which translation can clarify or elucidate a cryptic original" and "in which the target language rises above the source language" (Fogel 24).

Venuti's fear of domestication contrasts with Sun Yifeng's emphasis on the need "to recognize the practical usefulness of violence in translation, which functions to curtail alienation and estrangement" (173). Yifeng distinguishes between "gentle" violence in translation, perpetrated "primarily to facilitate crosscultural communication in dealing with the otherwise linguistically or culturally untranslatable" (160), and less benign violence, "represent[ing] manipulative rewriting, variously motivated to change meaning and sometimes form of the original as well," "abusive and even destructive as far as the source text is concerned" (160). Yifeng also draws attention to the "poignant paradox that the translator respects the original by abusing it and sometimes much is lost in translation not because of violence, but because there is a lack of violence" (173).

Yifeng's remarks are inspiring insofar as they encourage a less Manichean way of thinking about translation and translation quality assessment. If what happens to translated texts can, indeed, be termed violence and if translations are by their very nature imperfect, then perhaps they should be analysed in terms of avoidable violence: errors which can be easily eliminated as a result of a rigorous editing process should perhaps be distinguished from errors which seem more subjective and sometimes resist being categorized as such because they are connected with the overall stylistic effect of the given text. To sum up, from the vantage point of Polish translators and editors the most productive dilemmas involve the degree of "gentle violence" they are ready to perpetrate: should they "bow" to the enigmatic nature of Gibson's prose? Should they attempt to make it more palatable for the sake of Polish readership (cf Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska, "O przekładaniu" 46)? Or should they be bold enough to offer their own, idiosyncratic approximation of the writer's style, in

line with Peter Newmark's adage that "creativity in translation starts where imitation stops" (9) and his emphasis on "freedom within limits" (6)?

Trans(a)l(ien)ation: Practices

In this section of the article several translations samples will be presented and commented upon, but although they have been taken from the most recent publications of Gibson's prose in Poland, the doubts and objections they provoke are by no means new. In order to systematize and summarize the recurring problems with Polish translators' efforts, I have identified five main issues which could be described as follows: attempts at clarifying the original often make it even more difficult to understand; slang expressions and conversations sound unnatural; neologisms are handled poorly; straightforward mistranslations occur rather frequently; slavish imitation of the original syntax and lexicon seems to be the preferred strategy. Among the minor issues one should perhaps mention inconsistencies in tone and registers, the occasional division of the chapters into paragraphs which does not correspond with how the writer chose to divide them, and lack of attention to the peculiar cadence and rhythm of his sentences.

A close examination of the initial paragraphs in Gibson's *Peripheral* and its Polish translation (Table 1) reveals the presence of many of the above listed issues. Immediately noticeable is the Polish translator's decision to divide the introductory paragraph in the original into two paragraphs and to reorganize sentences into smaller or larger units, thus diminishing the power of the single paragraph exposition, breaking its flow and introducing unmotivated, syntactically dubious emphasis (for example, the phrase "Ociepłała i uszczelniała," the equivalent for "to stop it leaking and for insulation," sounds unnatural without a complement). The smart choice to replace "ghosts of the tattoos" with a more neutral expression, "memory of war tattoos" ("wspomnienie po wojennych tatuażach"), and to contextualize the word "pickers"[5] is marred by occasional mistranslations (in the Polish version it is Leon who smells, not the trailer; on the other hand, one cannot exclude the possibility that a simple typographic error has been committed), lazy editing (the nonsensical repetition of the word "później"), bizarre syntax ("gniazda os tak wielkiego, jakiego w życiu nie widzieli"), omission of pronouns coupled with slightly confusing punctuation (as a result of which the reader has to reread the passage to be sure that it is Flynne who is ten years old, rather than the trailer) and unnecessary change of register ("kaleka" denotes a "cripple"—a much more informal expression than "disability" in the original). Leaving words such as "haptics" and "airstream" untranslated (the

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5   In the paragraph under discussion, "picker" denotes "an early bird" "scoop[ing] up the good deals" (https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Picker). The translator opted for the more formal and dignified "kolekcjoner" ("collector") and thus avoided potential ambiguity (the rough informal equivalent, "szperacz" is not a commonly used word in the context of collecting things; it usually refers to a reflector).

so-called loan-translation) only strengthens the foreign feel of the text. And this is just the beginning of an almost 500-page translation of the novel.

Table 1.

Source text (English)	Target text (Polish)
THE HAPTICS They didn't think Flynne's brother had PTSD, but that sometimes the **haptics** glitched him. They said it was like phantom limb, **ghosts of the tattoos he'd worn in the war**, put there to tell him when to run, when to be still, when to do the bad-ass dance, which direction and what range. So they allowed him **some disability** for that, and he lived in the trailer down by the creek. An alcoholic uncle lived there when they were little, veteran of some other war, their father's older brother. **She and Burton and Leon used it for a fort, the summer she was ten.** Leon tried to take girls there, later on, but **it smelled too bad**. When Burton got his discharge, it was empty, except for **the biggest wasp nest any of them had ever seen**. Most valuable thing on their property, Leon said. **Airstream**, 1977. He showed her ones on eBay that looked like blunt rifle slugs, went for crazy money in any condition at all. The uncle had gooped this one over with white expansion foam, gone gray and dirty now, **to stop it leaking and for insulation**. Leon said that had saved it from **pickers**. She thought it looked like a big old grub, but with tunnels back through it to the windows. (*The Peripheral* 1)	HAPTYKI U brata Flynne nie zdiagnozowali zespołu stresu pourazowego. Uznali, że czasami dopadają go **haptyki**. Ich zdaniem było to trochę jak bóle fantomowe amputowanej kończyny, **wspomnienie po wojennych tatuażach**, dyktujących, kiedy ma biec, kiedy zamierać w bezruchu, a kiedy zagrać zajebistego twardziela, oraz w którą stronę i na jaki dystans. Dzięki nim dostał **małą rentę dla kalek**. Wprowadził się do przyczepy przy strumieniu. Kiedy byli mali, mieszkał w niej wujek alkoholik, weteran innej wojny, starszy brat ich ojca. **Była fortem w zabawach jej, Burtona i Leona latem, miała wtedy dziesięć lat**. Leon próbował zapraszać do niej dziewczyny, to później, ale później to **już za bardzo śmierdział**. A kiedy Burtona puścili do cywila, stała pusta, jeśli nie liczyć **gniazda os tak wielkiego, jakiego w życiu nie widzieli**. Leon powiedział, że to ich najcenniejsza rzecz, ten **airstream** z 1977 roku. Pokazał jej zdjęcia z eBaya. Wyglądały na nich jak tępe pociski karabinowe, a szły za szalone pieniądze, niezależnie od stanu technicznego. Wujek oblepił je białą gąbką z metra, teraz już szarą, postrzępioną. **Ocieplała i uszczelniała.** Leon twierdził, że to gąbka uratowała ją przed **kolekcjonerami.** Jej zdaniem przyczepa wyglądała jak wielki stary wykarczowany pień, ale z tunelami prowadzącymi do okien. (*Peryferal* 7)

A comparison of the first paragraphs of "The Gernsback Continuum" and its Polish rendition (Table 2) reveals an interesting pattern: although the translation problems here are less glaring than in the case of *The Peripheral's* introduction, nevertheless the Polish text abounds in rather baffling choices, especially in terms of lexis and syntax. Starting with the first sentence, the exclusively abstract nature of the lexical equivalent for "the whole thing" leads to an unnatural-sounding collocation with the verb "blaknąć" ("to pale"). The "mad-doctor" gets translated as "obłąkany nau-

kowiec," even though "szalony" would definitely be the preferred adjective in this expression. Because of the difficulty of transforming "latające skrzydło" ("flying wing") into an adjectival structure, the translator enriches the description of the "flying-wing liner" (likely to make sure that the Polish reader understands the concept). Cholewa's most interesting, if controversial, lexical choice involves the word "chrome," which gets translated as "odpryski przezroczy" (literally: "chips" or "slivers" of slides)—the word "odprysk" refers either to the process of splashing off or to the resulting hollowness, or to a tiny fragment or an object that has splashed off a hard surface.[6] If this idea is far from precise, it at least activates the readers' imagination and seems to be in tune with the protagonist's constant questioning of the observable reality. The obvious mistranslation in the paragraph—the adverb "discreetly" is rendered as "uprzejmie" ("kindly")—seems rather inconsequential, as opposed to the unnatural ("był ten wielki liniowiec… nad San Francisco") or illogical syntax (it would make sense for the concluding sentence in the Polish translation to follow the syntactic pattern of the preceding sentence, e.g., "Sporo pomogła mi telewizja" —literally "Television helped [me] a lot"). Paradoxically, the perfective aspect of the verb "to help" ("pomogła" rather than the imperfective "pomagała") would have been a more rational choice and, together with the elimination of the unnecessary coordinating conjunction "I" ("and") it would have prevented the last sentence from losing the cadence of the original.

Table 2.

Source text (English)	Target text (Polish)
Mercifully, **the whole thing** is starting to **fade**, to become an episode. When I do still catch the odd glimpse, it's peripheral; mere fragments of **mad-doctor chrome**, confining themselves to the corner of the eye. **There was that flying-wing liner** over San Francisco last week, but it was almost translucent. And the shark-fin roadsters have gotten scarcer, and freeways **discreetly avoid** unfolding themselves into the gleaming eighty-lane monsters I was forced to drive last month in my rented Toyota. And I know that none of it will follow me to New York; my vision is narrowing to a single wavelength of probability. I've worked hard for that. **Television helped a lot.** ("The Gernsback Continuum" 37)	Szczęśliwie **cała sprawa** zaczęła powoli **blaknąć**, stawać się epizodem. Niekiedy wciąż dostrzegam jakiś przebłysk, ale już tylko na granicy pola widzenia: ledwie widoczne kątem oka **odpryski przezroczy obłąkanego naukowca**. W zeszłym tygodniu **był ten wielki liniowiec**, **latające skrzydło** nad San Francisco, ale wydawał się prawie przejrzysty. Coraz rzadziej spotykam skrzydlate krążowniki szos, a autostrady **uprzejmie unikają** rozwijania się w lśniące osiemdziesięciopasmowe monstra, jakimi w zeszłym miesiącu musiałem jechać wynajętą toyotą. Wiem też, że nic z tego nie podąży za mną do Nowego Jorku—mój wzrok zawęża się do pojedynczej długości fali prawdopodobieństwa. Ciężko na to pracowałem. **I telewizja bardzo mi pomagała.** ("Kontinuum Gernsbacka" 41)

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6   https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/odprysk;2493556.html.

Numerous passages in the Polish translations of *The Peripheral* and "The Gernsback Continuum" suggest that Sokołowski and Cholewa were not entirely invested in making the original texts more accessible. On the contrary, some of their decisions as regards grammar, syntax or phrasing actually made the prose even more confusing. The scene in *The Peripheral* in which Flynne, the female protagonist, is beta-testing a virtual game (Table 3), is a striking example of this tendency. The expression "this one" in the second sentence of the English original clearly refers to one of the robot girls Flynne is observing. This shift in emphasis has not been successfully rendered in the translation, where each of the sentences begins with a verb in the same grammatical form (tense, person, gender, mood and number— enough information to make the use of the relevant pronoun unnecessary and unnatural). The beginning of the third sentence of the Polish translation implies that the person described here is still Flynne. Therefore, the details of the face provided in the final sentence of the paragraph lead to a cognitive dissonance; only by rereading all of the sentences again, the reader will be able to understand whose body is being watched and described.

Table 3.

Source text (English)	Target text (Polish)
SURVEILLANT **She dropped** toward two bugs, **hovered**, scoping one of the robot girls without changing focus. **This one** was wearing a quilted vest with lots of pockets, little shiny tools sticking up in them. **She** was using something like a dental pick to individually arrange things, too small to see, on top of sushi. Round black eyes in the china face, wider apart than human eyes, but they hadn't been there before. (*The Peripheral* 33)	OBSERWATORKA **Skoczyła** na dwa robale. **Zawisła** nieruchomo, nie spuszczając z oka jednej z robotek i nie zmieniając ogniskowej. **Miała** na sobie pikowaną kamizelkę z mnóstwem kieszeni, z których sterczały małe lśniące narzędzia. **Używała** narzędzia przypominającego zgłębnik dentystyczny do układania na sushi czegoś tak małego, że aż niewidocznego. **Miała** też okrągłe czarne oczy w porcelanowej twarzy, rozstawione szerzej niż ludzkie, a przecież przedtem ich tam nie było. (*Peryferal* 27)

Neologisms have always been a staple of Gibson's fiction, regardless of the literary genre he chose for his short stories or novels, and a major challenge for their translators. *The Peripheral* is no exception in this regard. As an extrapolation of two future, largely transhumanist worlds, it makes frequent references to new sociocultural rituals, trends, artefacts, professions, and communities. In what might be perceived as the most striking example of a Gibsonian neologism, the sixth chapter of the novel describes *patchers*: a group of one hundred "deformed cannibals" (Joyce) inhabiting a plastic garbage island drifting on the Pacific Ocean.

Table 4.

Source text (English)	Target text (Polish)
The patchers, their prime directive to cleanse the fouled water column, had assembled this place from recovered polymers. (*The Peripheral* 22)	**Plamiarze**, ich głównym zajęciem było oczyszczanie skalanych kolumn wody, złożyli to miejsce z odzyskanych polimerów. (*Peryferal* 24)

As can be seen in Table 4, The Polish translator opted for the word "plamiarz," a noun which does not appear in dictionaries of the Polish language and is not used in everyday speech. The rationale for Sokołowski's choice seems obvious enough: the official Polish name for the actually existing Great Pacific garbage patch is "Wielka Pacyficzna Plama Śmieci."[7] However, the application of the analogous word-forming mechanism (patch → patchers, plama → plamiarze) impoverishes and distorts the original. Apart from its toponymic aspect, the word p*atcher* refers also to the idea of repairing something in a fairly primitive way; creating something new (*patchworking*); modifying and/or improving computer software; cosmetic procedures (*patch* as the so-called beauty spot), etc.[8] Its Polish counterpart brings associations with destroying things or making them dirty, rather than with creating or improving them. On the other hand, the multi-layered network of references activated by Gibson's neologism makes it practically impossible to offer a completely satisfactory equivalent in the Polish language.

While the translator's failure is understandable in the case of particularly complex neologisms, such as the above discussed *patcher*, his overall approach towards newly coined expressions cannot be excused so easily. There are simply no clear-cut or consistent rules as regards the creation and spelling of the neologisms in *Peryferal*. The table below demonstrates Sokołowski's hodge-podge methodology and the highly problematic nature of some of his literal translations.

Table 5.

Source text (English)	Target text (Polish)
quadcopters (*The Peripheral* 78)	quadcoptery (*Peryferal* 118)
shards (*The Peripheral* 119)	shardsy (*Peryferal* 187) [the "s" and "y" morphemes double the idea of plurality]
had a Viz (*The Peripheral* 49)	miała Viza (*Peryferal* 69) [noun declension]
display (*The Peripheral* 113)	displej (*Peryferal* 177) [no noun declension]
stub [rozwidlenie czasowe] (*The Peripheral* 48)	kikut (*Peryferal* 68)
Rainey's cameraperson (*The Peripheral* 17)	kamerosoba Rainey (*Peryferal* 16)

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7   https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wielka_Pacyficzna_Plama_Śmieci.

8   http://www.thefreedictionary.com/patch.

mourning jet (*The Peripheral* 42)	dżet (*Peryferal* 56)
driftglass (*The Peripheral* 42)	driftglass (*Peryferal* 56)
Wheelie Boy's tablet (*The Peripheral* 210)	Tablet Szalonej Jazdy (*Peryferal* 331)
fabbing [3D printing] (*The Peripheral*: 90)	fabrykowanie (*Peryferal* 138)
fabbing (*The Peripheral* 174)	fabowanie (*Peryferal* 275)
Homes [Homeland Security agents] (*The Peripheral* 28)	Krajowcy (*Peryferal* 34)
[S]quidsuit. Cuttlefish camo. (*The Peripheral* 120)	[K]amomątwa. Kamuflaż z ośmiornicy. Mątwy. (*Peryferal* 188)
drop bear (*The Peripheral* 178)	spadomiś (*Peryferal* 279)
The klept (*The Peripheral* 210)	klepty (*Peryferal* 331)

Finally, the issue of syntactic and lexical calques deserves to be raised, especially because they constitute one of the arguably most irritating aspects of the work done by the Polish translators. However well-meant it may have been, the slavish imitation of the constructions and lexical items in the literary originals often results in unnatural, downright ridiculous translations, particularly when the context requires a less formal register (Table 6).

Table 6.

Source text (English)	Target text (Polish)
'But it could be worse, huh?' 'That's right,' I said, 'or **even worse, it could be perfect.**' ("The Gernsback Continuum" 50)	– Ale mogłoby być gorzej, nie? – Zgadza się – przyznałem. – Albo **całkiem fatalnie: mógłby być perfekcyjny**. ("Kontinuum Gernsbacka" 52)
The Thirties **had seen** the first generation of American industrial designers ("The Gernsback Continuum" 39)	Lata trzydzieste **widziały** pierwszą generację amerykańskich projektantów wzornictwa przemysłowego. ("Kontinuum Gernsbacka" 43)
The designers were populists, **you see**. ("The Gernsback Continuum" 40)	Projektanci byli populistami, **rozumiesz**. ("Kontinuum Gernsbacka" 44)
Fixed me with **his best basilisk glare.** ("The Gernsback Continuum" 42)	Obrzucił mnie **najlepszym bazyliszkowym wzrokiem.** ("Kontinuum Gernsbacka" 46)
"You're a horrible **piece of shit**," said Wilf. (*The Peripheral*: 303)	– Obrzydliwa z ciebie **kupa gówna** – powiedział Wilf. (*Peryferal*: 477)

"It's real," Daedra said. "And **whoever** was operating your guard is now **wherever** you started from, **whenever**, telling **whoever** is there that you're in trouble. … But not understanding how much." (*The Peripheral* 296-297)	– Jest prawdziwa – powiedziała Daedra. – A **ten, który** operował twoją ochroną, jest teraz **tam**, **skąd** przyszliście, **gdziekolwiek** to jest, i mówi **komuś, komukolwiek**, kogo **tam** spotkał, że wpadliście w kłopoty. … Ale nie wie, **w jak wielkie** kłopoty. (*Peryferal* 466)
She didn't really like the business part of it. She **guessed she disliked it about as much as Shaylene liked it.** (*The Peripheral* 312)	Prowadzenie biznesu nie podobało jej się zbytnio. **Było czymś, czego nie lubiła chyba tak bardzo, jak Shaylene lubiła.** (*Peryferal* 492)

Conclusions

In my 2002 analysis of Polish translations of two novels by Gibson, *Neuromancer* and *Idoru*, I emphasized the heavily foreignizing quality of the work done by their translators, Piotr Cholewa and Zbigniew Królicki, respectively, and their refusal to make the novels more accessible to the uninitiated readers ("Approaching" 436). I also suggested that because of their rich experience some of the inconsistencies in their work tended to be ignored or treated as intentional, even justified. Furthermore, to furnish the context for literary translators' endeavors in general, I mentioned the profound lexical and syntactic changes in the Polish language in the second half of the 1990s, resulting partly from the rapid pace of political, economic, cultural and technological transformation in Poland and the readiness of the country's literary market to "take advantage of the instability of translation norms" ("Approaching" 432). In addition, I commented on the lack of properly coordinated, fully professional editing process so typical of numerous publishing houses in Poland, especially those keen on releasing genre fiction, including science fiction. Of course, to make the picture complete, more issues should be touched upon, such as relatively low remuneration for literary translators coupled with oftentimes unrealistic deadlines, and their being deprived of affordable legal assistance.

Disappointingly enough, the passage of 28 years since the first Polish translation of Gibson's prose was published has not led to a radical change for the better. Similarly to the previous translations of Gibson's work, the Polish edition of *The Peripheral* and the second version of *Burning Chrome* rarely succeed in making the cryptic content of the originals more accessible (cf. Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska, "Approaching" 442) and, to make matters worse, they offer numerous instances of mistranslations and stylistic incongruities, while the editing process, as always, leaves a lot to be desired. One is tempted to suggest that the experience Sokołowski and Cholewa have gained throughout the years encouraged them to produce very literal, "safe", slavishly imitative translations.

But there is yet another aspect of the time travel I decide to undertake in order to pinpoint some of the regularities as regards translating Gibson into Polish. On a meta level, his idea of a continuum could easily be extended to cover the above described translation practices. Termed an "economical commentary on the history of science fiction over the past half-century" (Ross 412), Gibson's story functions partly as a satire on the notion that progress happens in a linear, logical manner, through systematic accretion. Ironically, Polish translations of Gibson's oeuvre in the past 28 years take this notion to another level. Time passage does not guarantee that the translators will "know better"—that they will make much fewer errors or distort/neglect the literary original to a lesser extent. One could argue that with the advent of the Internet and its popular lexicons, databases and encyclopedias, such as Wikipedia, IMDb or Lyrics.com, most of the cultural references in the source texts should not even be treated as challenging, nor should they be worthy of translators' domesticating efforts since, after all, most of them are easily Googleable. However, truly good and captivating translations of Gibson's prose are still nowhere to be seen, and at least two partial explanations can be offered to account for that lack. Firstly, the availability of even the most reliable information cannot solve what should be treated as a problem of literary style, rather than merely content and big ideas. In other words, Gibson is still waiting for a Polish translator with a genuine writing talent. The other answer might seem scarier: the perfect, or at least more polished translation, free from avoidable errors, is merely an unattainable, constantly receding point of destination—a (semiotic) ghost, like the flying-wing liner hovering over the protagonist of "The Gernsback Continuum" in its faux translucence. And this is a humbling, if unacceptable, scenario.

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