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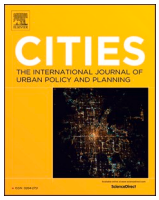

Hauntological atmospheres of the UK high street: Consuming Manchester's Halloween in the City

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces a novel perspective on the production and consumption of high street atmospheres amidst the prevailing narratives of its impending decline and death. We explore how high street atmospheres are continually repositioned across past, present and future elements, experiences and narratives that are in constant tension with one another. We argue that these emergent tensions create a unique potential for atmospheric production that has a spectral, post-nostalgic element to the high street experience. Drawing on walking methods, semi-structured interviews with atmosphere curators and high street users and documentary analysis, this paper uses the case of Manchester Business Improvement District's Halloween in the City event to examine these tensions in the high street. In so doing, it introduces the concept of hauntological atmospheres to deconstruct and showcase how the legacies of the past still exert a powerful affective influence in the design, staging and performance of present atmospheres and experiences of the high street.

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, high streets, traditionally viewed as central shopping and social hubs in towns and city centres, have witnessed symptoms of socio-economic and cultural decline, sparking debates around their viability and vitality (Hubbard, 2017; Ntounis et al., 2023). Some have gone as far as predicting the death of the high street, arguing that their primary function as consumption spaces has been drastically reshaped by the emergence of disruptive retail environments (Brown et al., 2021; Hughes & Jackson, 2015), including out-of-town and online shopping. Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated some of the shadows cast over high streets (Florida et al., 2023; White et al., 2023). In response, urban policymakers and think tanks have envisioned various futures for high streets. One common assumption is that they should be repositioned as mixed-use spaces, combining commercial, residential, retail, experiential and public functions (Steadman & Millington, 2022). Despite these shifts, high streets remain primary arenas for material and experiential consumption. However, it is widely accepted that their heyday as the go-to place for shopping has waned, as consumers' demographic changes, time-deprived lifestyles and socio-cultural needs have completely altered the consumerscapes of retail-dominant streets (Cachinho, 2014). In this ever-changing environment, high streets now face an existential crisis and must innovate to offer affective and multi-dimensional customer interactions that emphasise the urban over traditional shopping experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2019; Rao & Liu, 2023). This approach seems crucial to countering the hypothetical death of high streets (Florida et al., 2023; Hughes & Jackson, 2015) and aligning with new urban politico-economic orthodoxy, in which the role of events and festivals stand out (Cudny, 2016; Smith & Osborn, 2022).

In this paper, we explore the repositioning of high streets as (also) experiential places (White et al., 2023) and test beds for memorable place-based innovations designed to elicit welcoming and enjoyable atmospheres. Through Manchester Business Improvement District's (BID) Halloween in the City (HitC) event, we examine the practices of production and consumption of eventualised high street atmospheres. By doing so, we address recent pleas from authors (Steadman & Coffin, 2024; Sumartojo & Pink, 2019) to grasp the practicalities of atmospheric production and their pivotal role in expanding our understanding of urban issues, such as the 'wicked problem' of high street decline. The 'wicked problem' of the high street refers to the spiral of decline driven by complex and multifaceted challenges, including out-of-town and online shopping, shifting consumer behaviours and economic pressures following events like the 2008 financial crisis and COVID-19 pandemic.

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As one might expect, these and other voices of decline have collectively undermined the vitality and viability of high streets as entertainment, leisure and shopping destinations over the last few decades (Parker et al., 2017; Steadman & Millington, 2022). In this paper, we contend that the 'wickedness' of the ideal high street stems from the uncertainty about its ideal form and function. This uncanniness and anxiety bring, we argue, a spectral dimension to the study of high street atmospheres and a potentiality for urban atmospheric production to revitalise post-nostalgic high streets that have lost certain commercial, socio-economic and experiential values.

This paper examines how HitC atmospheres intermingle with hauntological dimensions to reinvent high street futures while acknowledging its haunted past (Anderson & Hamilton, 2024). We do so by highlighting the efforts of an established urban place management body (Manchester BID) to imbue euphoric, effervescent and pleasant atmospheres that generate collective excitement (Hill et al., 2022) and reinvigorate the high street experience (Parker et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2024). Ultimately, our study posits that idea(l)s about high street atmospheres are positioned between past, present and future layers that are always in tension with one another. We thus extend Steadman et al.'s (2021) arguments of atmospheric porosity concerning spatiotemporal and multisensory interactions by showcasing the evocative and haunting elements of decaying urban atmospheres. Atmospheric porosity thus refers to the permeable boundaries of atmospheres that allow for a fluid exchange of past memories and future anticipations, thereby influencing the emotional and cognitive responses of individuals within a given environment. In so doing, we further outline that high street atmospheres encapsulate different temporal layers, formed and re-formed through processes of remembering and forgetting (Anderson & Hamilton, 2024; Miller, 2023), which shape our present emotional and cognitive experiences of the high street.

To ground these arguments, this paper draws upon Jacques Derrida's (1994) concept of 'hauntology' to assemble an onto-affective framework we term hauntological atmospheres. Hauntology combines 'haunting' (the return of something) and 'ontology' (how we see things) to explore how past events, experiences and ideologies, akin to the presence of ghosts or spectres, continue to resonate and influence the present, even if their original context or significance has faded. Hauntological discussions are emerging across numerous intellectual fields, including literary and film studies (Fisher, 2012; Paciorek, 2023), social and cultural anthropology (Good et al., 2022; McPherson, 2024), cultural and heritage studies (Buser, 2017; Paphitis, 2020) and consumer marketing (Ahlberg et al., 2021; Anderson & Hamilton, 2024; Brown et al., 2021; James et al., 2024). Central to these contributions is the recognition that unresolved understandings of events, memories and histories continue to influence present and future experiences.

In this sense, hauntology aligns with our wider understanding of atmospheres as fragmented, incomplete and porous entities. These are not merely shaped by immediate, present encounters, but are also filled and haunted by the sensorial and affective influences of bygone encounters and experiences (Brown et al., 2021; Buser, 2017; Steadman et al., 2021). They exist in a state of "anachronic disjointure" (Derrida, 1994: 32–33), a premise rooted in Derridean deconstructionism where past reverberations are embedded within atmospheric-making practices. Thus, a hauntological approach enables us to examine high street atmospheres in light of a detailed understanding of their evolution (Anderson & Hamilton, 2024; Campbell, 2012) and the formative conditions that have rendered high streets from places of prosperity to spaces of decline.

Foundational to this endeavour is the notion that time is not a neat sequence of moments. Instead, a sense of temporal disjointedness or dyschronia emerges through affective encounters with ghosts or spectres of the past in the present (Fisher, 2018). As Derrida (1994: 20) notes, "time is *disarticulated*, dislocated, dislodged, … *deranged*, both out of order and mad" and "out of joint", breaking the natural flow of time and meaning that past, present and future become entangled, creating a sense of temporal instability. This is reflected in the growing intellectual production on nostalgic consumption and retro-marketing documenting the affective allure through which retail brands have reinterpreted and recontextualised elements from the past to evocate deeper emotional engagement with consumers and induce consumption (Ahlberg et al., 2021; Brown, 2001; Brown et al., 2021; James et al., 2024; Södergren, 2022).

The case in which this paper draws – Manchester's HitC event – constitutes a clear hauntological example in itself. Indeed, Halloween revives and reinterprets historical and folkloric elements, such as ghosts, pumpkin lanterns and witches, associated with death, the supernatural and the return of the dead (Kelly & Riach, 2020). We might think of them as spectres of the past that are reimagined within a wider capitalist politico-economy orthodoxy (James et al., 2024; Miller, 2023). While Derrida (1994: 46) originally described spectral presence as subversive to "the structure of every hegemony", these spectres are now deliberately designed to be enjoyable, safe and non-disruptive to market logic (James et al., 2024; Södergren, 2022). As Fisher (2009: 9) suggests, "[w]hat we are dealing with now is not the incorporation of materials that have previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but instead their *precorporation*: the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture" (see also Fisher, 2018).

At the intersection of constituting and reconstituting these spectres in the present lies the central concern of this paper: understanding the affective dimensions of hauntology in urban consumption spaces (Brown et al., 2021; Miller, 2023). The uncanny, often described as the unsettling experience of encountering something simultaneously familiar and alien, plays a crucial role in this aim. Drawing on Fisher's (2016: 10) notion of "the strange within the familiar", this paper extends the theorising on urban consumption atmospheres by incorporating hauntological concepts to examine the spectral aspects of atmospheric production. While much of the literature has focused on the positive, nostalgic aspects of hauntology (Ahlberg et al., 2021; James et al. 2024; Kolehmainen & Mäkinen, 2019; Södergren, 2022), we argue that hauntological atmospheres *also* elicit feelings of anxiety, eeriness and disorientation. In particular, Derrida's concept of the uncanny in atmospheric grammars highlights how unresolved issues and memories from the past haunt the present and future in unsettling and unpredictable ways (Derrida, 1994; Paphitis, 2020). These encounters evoke feelings of anxiety, discomfort, disorientation, dissonance, estrangement and fear, blurring the boundaries between the known/unknown and the past/present and making the uncanny a central affective dimension of hauntological atmospheres.

This paper is further organised into four sections. It begins by discussing the practices of atmospheric production and their significance within the wider context of urban and high-street entrepreneurialism. Next, it outlines the research context and design. The third section examines how various practices of atmospheric production contribute to the making of pleasurable, familial, playful and convivial atmospheres. The paper then introduces the notion of hauntological atmospheres to illustrate how the affective presence/resonance from the past, in planned and unplanned forms, shapes the present atmospheres of HitC. The paper closes by discussing its main findings and offering future academic and policymaking directions for the study, design and territorialisation of urban consumption atmospheres.

2. Atmospheres of consumption in the entrepreneurial city

2.1. The production of urban atmospheres of consumption

Urban planners and designers have explored the potential of atmospheres to foster positive emotional and sensorial engagement and experiences in urban settings (Thibaud, 2015; Viderman & Knierbein, 2020). This often involves using urban events, festivals and related place-making initiatives to direct individuals' attention towards particular elements of the urban landscape as ways to influence how

people perceive, navigate and consume the city (Cudny, 2016; Smith & Osborn, 2022). Hence, atmospheric production has involved the design and management of sensory elements to enhance the allure of urban environments and direct dwellers towards particular consumption practices (Steadman & Coffin, 2024). Here, scholars have thoroughly documented how particular affective sensorial stimuli are used to draw urban dwellers and consumers into memorable and pleasurable experiences (Adey et al., 2013; Edensor, 2015). These elements are combined into integrated, often immersive, experiences, meant to elicit and modulate senses and behaviours. Brighenti and Kärrholm (2018a) found that atmospheric interventions have rhythmic and social dimensions aimed at producing pleasurable experiences and promoting particular forms of sociability or exclusion. Similarly, Steadman et al. (2021) demonstrated how atmospheric porosity affects consumers' past memories, present actions and future anticipations, thereby revealing a place's potential dynamism. Therefore, we might understand urban consumption atmospheres as fragmented, incomplete and transient entities, continuously made and re-made through the juxtaposing of both present and past affective encounters and experiences (Bille et al., 2015; Buser, 2017).

Atmospheres thus have an affective power under which we sense, navigate and perceive places (Sumartojo & Pink, 2019; Thibaud, 2015), showcasing manipulative or disciplinary thickness (Brighenti & Pavoni, 2019; Vainio et al., 2024). Sensory stimuli (music, temperature or lighting), pedestrian streams and information are often assembled to produce immersive experiences brimming with positive emotions, such as tranquillity (Adey et al., 2013), conviviality and playfulness (Edensor, 2012; Woods, 2021), arousal and pleasure (Li et al., 2022), and render individuals vulnerable to certain consumer practices (Goss, 1993; Healy, 2014; Miller & Laketa, 2019). Hence, urban atmospheres are closely associated with atmospheric monocultures, which evolve from the strange/uncanny to the familiar/homely through embodiment. However, such production also occurs in places where "feelings clash and collide, but also mutually define each other" (De Matteis, 2024: 95), thus creating atmospheric assemblages whereby a place's preexisting emotional contents are intertwined with its affective resonances in the here-and-now. Therefore, atmospheres are always co-produced through affective encounters between human and non-human participants, evoking a sense of familiarity intertwined with the lingering presence of past experiences (Eronen, 2024; Steadman et al., 2021). However, the emergence of atmospheres is also unpredictable, as different people's understandings of past and present atmospheres and experiences may lead to varying practices and emotional connections to places (Paiva, 2023; Sumartojo & Pink, 2019). This unpredictability underlines the idea that "atmospheres emerge as multi-temporal tensions" (Bille et al., 2015: 34), as the past continues to have affective resonances in the present, thus influencing how atmospheres are produced and experienced. We argue that these tensions are in full play in the contemporary high street and thus ripe for hauntological analysis, whereby we next explore the politics of atmospheric production in the entrepreneurial city.

2.2. *The politics of atmospheres in the entrepreneurial city*

The production of urban consumption atmospheres is closely intertwined with the rise of the entrepreneurial city, where urban policymakers increasingly adopt market-driven approaches to enhance urban liveability and economic growth (Acuto et al., 2021; McCann, 2004). Within these wider practices, cities have turned to public-private partnerships and similar business-oriented strategies to reinvent their futures by creating attractive amenities and cultural venues, driving economic development and enhancing the city's reputation. While mega-urban projects have long been used to achieve these aims, recent years have seen a declining appetite for such large-scale initiatives and a turn into nimbler and more nuanced approaches to improve urban liveability and the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2019; White et al., 2023). These approaches have involved creating vibrant public spaces through atmospheric production, using sensory cues like bustling street scenes, active nightlife and outdoor recreation to attract residents and visitors (Carmona, 2015; Florida et al., 2023).

These and other sensory stimuli, their affective qualities and emotional responses foreground the inherently political nature of atmospheric production practices as ways to shape how residents and visitors experience and re-imagine urban spaces (Steadman et al., 2021; Viderman & Knierbein, 2020). High streets are among the spaces adopting entrepreneurial facets and turning to the power of atmospheric production to reinvent and reposition themselves again as primary arenas for material and experiential consumption (Adams et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2017). Of course, the practices of atmospheric production in the entrepreneurial high street are rarely neutral. They tend to prioritise certain narratives and stakeholders while marginalising or silencing others (Warnaby & Medway, 2013). However, this conceptualisation seems to partly overlook that atmospheres are always-in-making and never complete. In this sense, Coffin and Chatzidakis (2021) introduced the notion of implacement as an atmosphere-making practice to argue that urban stakeholders excluded from formal decision-making processes still possess the agency to engage with, disturb or redefine the planned atmospheres to express their own identities and preferences. Unsurprisingly, then, the issues of power and politics come to the forefront in atmospheric production, particularly when coalitions of urban stakeholders, including businesses, real estate representatives and local governments, work to produce enjoyable and welcoming 'public' spaces to visit, play and consume in (Carmona, 2015, 2022; De Magalhães, 2014; Kudla, 2024).

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are among these coalitions. BIDs are public-private partnerships where local businesses vote to pay a levy that is ring-fenced for financing place-making programmes within their shopping district. Often described as open-air malls, BIDs aim to replicate the controlled, orderly atmospheres of out-of-town shopping environments in high streets, while challenging online shopping (Goss, 1993; Miller & Laketa, 2019). They claim to have successfully counteracted the voices of business decline through their involvement in the day-to-day management of public spaces. This includes numerous place-making programmes, such as streetscape cleaning and maintenance, security and consumer and place marketing, that strive to leave a high-standard stamp on the appearance, safety and convenience of urban shopping districts as ways to extend dwell time and encourage consumer spending (Pine & Gilmore, 2019; Silva & Cachinho, 2021). In so doing, BIDs assemble carefully-designed atmospheres to draw people in and prompt specific behaviours, while downplaying elements of urban decay, neglect and disorder (Carmona, 2015; Kudla, 2024).

Through their place-making programmes, BIDs often position themselves as a "remedy against dominant and negative mythopoesis" (Zanette et al., 2023: 171) associated with high street decline. In particular, we might think of BIDs as 'exorcists' that use magical practices, often relying on the much-heralded importance of eventification and festivalisation (Cudny, 2016; Smith & Osborn, 2022) and other stereotypical urban place management approaches, to re-activate the vitality and viability of urban shopping districts described as 'ghosts' of their former selves (Brown et al., 2021). These strategies attempt to dispel the fears of high street death (Florida et al., 2023; Hubbard, 2017) and thus reinvent and reposition high streets within the spatial division of consumption. Through these practices, BIDs strive to challenge the voices of death and anxiety accompanying the transformation of retail environments in recent decades, resonating with the uncertainty that now shadows high street futures (Ahlberg et al., 2021; Cachinho, 2014; Miller, 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1. Introducing Manchester BID and Halloween in the City (HitC)

Managed by CityCo, the city-centre management company, and now in its third five- year term (founded in 2013), Manchester BID is a private sector-led initiative with over 600 businesses investing in extra revitalisation programmes through a levy based on their commercial business rates to enhance the local business climate (Fig. 1). With an annual budget exceeding £1 million, these programmes include marketing campaigns, city-centre ambassadors, street cleaning, business intelligence and, more recently, environmental and social projects (Manchester BID, 2022).

A significant portion of Manchester BID's budget has been consistently allocated towards events to boost footfall and press coverage. Originally focusing on two major events, the BID's programme has expanded to include six annual events, strategically timed to capitalise on key retail periods and attract diverse audiences (Manchester BID, 2017). Among these, the HitC event stands out. Since its launch in 2016, this event has turned Manchester into 'the home of the monsters', with iconic inflatable monsters, spooky installations and other Halloween extravaganzas across the city. Hailed as a success since its inception, the numbers from the 2023 HitC event are remarkable. Apparently, it attracted 250,000 visitors to the city, garnered around £900,000 in press coverage and received over 250,000 views on its event page (CityCo Manchester, 2024).

3.2. Research design

Atmospheres present significant challenges for research due to their ephemeral, transient and non-representational nature (Adey et al., 2013; Anderson, 2009; Paiva & Sánchez-Fuarros, 2021). To address these complexities, this paper advocates for an approach that considers both collective experiences and individual perceptions, and emotional and affective responses. Drawing on Schroer and Schmitt's (2018: 6) work, it advocates shifting research on atmospheres away from universalising personal experiences and "to the partial, situational and historical aspects of human and nonhuman lifeworlds". This approach acknowledges the multi-temporal tensions where past, present and future are continuously entangled and affect the production and experience of urban atmospheres, illuminating how the spectral presence of the past shapes our understanding of atmospheres as more than just momentary experiences (Bille et al., 2015; Steadman et al., 2021). In particular, this paper explores the hauntological practices of atmosphere production and experience beyond traditional spectral instances like industrial ruins (Edensor, 2005, 2008; Hill, 2013) and heritage spaces (Buser, 2017; Goulding & Pressey, 2023) to include everyday urban environments such as high streets, where collective memories of the past, the present experience and future expectations overlap and inform emotional and affective connections to place (Anderson & Hamilton, 2024).

With this in mind, this paper employs a multi-method approach. We used walking as a well-established method in human geography and urban studies for two main reasons. First, it allowed us to immerse ourselves in the research context in an embodied and situated manner, moving beyond individualistic experiences (Edensor, 2008; Schroer & Schmitt, 2018). As the HitC event unfolded on streets and public spaces at different times throughout the week, walking emerged as an appropriate method to capture the embodied experiences of both the high street and the event itself. Secondly, it facilitated a relational-processual approach that emphasises the interconnectedness between human and non-human worlds through multisensory experiences (Taylor et al., 2023).

In particular, two of the authors conducted a week-long series of observational walks within the BID area, spanning the days before, during and after the main event, which took place on the weekend of 28–29 October 2023. These walking sessions were conducted on various days of the week and at different times, covering both streets and places included in the event programme and those that were not. The walking routes were not predetermined, allowing the capture of how the practices of staging and performing atmospheric elements varied over different spacetimes.[1] During these sessions, two researchers walked both individually and in pairs. When walking alone, we later convened to discuss our embodied knowledge and experiences. In all cases, we were equipped with cameras to record meaningful atmospheric encounters. This approach aimed to build a thick description of the practices of atmosphere production and their subjective affective resonances in both ourselves and high street users. In addition to photographs and videos, this materialised in the form of fieldnotes to capture our and others' "responses to situations and events [that] play out in front of us … [and describe] how and why we decided to record the things we did" (Jones, 2024: 6). Collectively, these materials document how the atmospheres of HitC were produced and experienced, and the different time-bound atmospheres embedded in the high street.

In addition to the observation walks, we conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with BID executive directors, marketing professionals, officers and performers involved in the construction, staging and performance of HitC, and high-street users who attended the event (Table 1). For BID senior figures and officers, the interviews centred on three themes: (i) the local context for the formation of the BID and its evolving services; (ii) the logistical and operational aspects of HitC, focusing on the practices of constructing, staging and performing atmospheres; and (iii) the affective and experiential resonances of HitC atmospheres on businesses and visitors. For the latter, we employed a social media-based recruitment strategy, selecting and inviting participants through Instagram in the weeks following the event. The criteria for selection required that participants had a public profile and posted photos or videos using the event's official hashtag (#halloweenmcr). These interviews focused on three themes: (i) the motivations to visit the high street and HitC; (ii) the perception and documentation of HitC atmospheres, exploring why high street users chose to record specific videos and photos; and (iii) the affective and cognitive resonances of HitC atmospheres on individual and collective behaviour and mood. This approach echoes Bille et al.'s (2015) argument that exploring why such materials were recorded as fruitful snapshots to understand how atmospheres made perceptible. Complementing these interviews was a range of secondary materials, including press releases, newspaper articles and BID-produced documents.

4. Hauntological atmospheres of the UK high street: Consuming Manchester's Halloween in the City

4.1. Romancing the ideal high street: Producing and experiencing Halloween in the City atmospheres

> Saturday morning. We've arrived at the HitC, the retail areas are pleasantly intermingled with colourful cartoonish stands, music stages, games and families dressed up in costumes. University students film Instagram reels while applying spooky makeup to match the decorations. Children enthusiastically participate in the activities. Even adults are taking time to get a bit wacky! Holding the MCR monsters map, a little girl bosses her dad to move faster as they need the next monster to tick it off the list. An older couple passes and admires the kid-friendly atmosphere in St Ann's Square. There are some stalls: One selling spooky bakes and cookies, another one, a Lush stand, promoting [Halloween-themed] bath bombs, soaps and

[1] Walking sessions took place on Wednesday 25 October 2023 (from 12:30 pm to 1:45 pm and from 7:00 pm to 9:30 pm), Thursday 26 October (from 6:30 pm to 07:30 pm), Saturday 28 October 2023 (from 1:00 pm to 08:00 pm), Sunday 29 October 2023 (from 11:00 am to 05:00 pm) and Monday 30 October 2023 (from 2:00 pm to 7:00 pm).

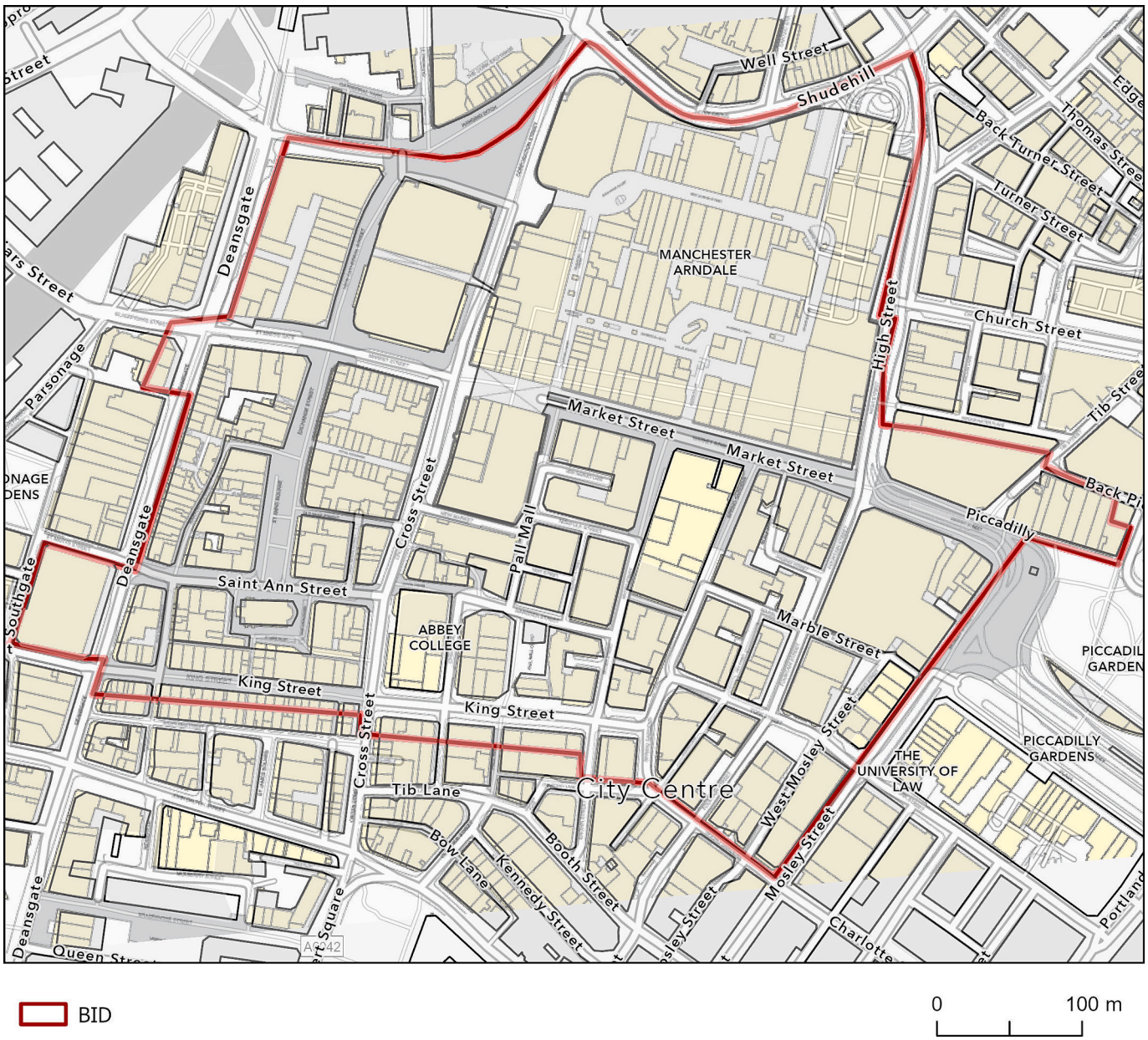

Fig. 1. Manchester City Centre BID area. Source: own elaboration.

> cosmetics… This feels like a missed opportunity for other businesses to bring similar products though. I wonder if it has to do with costs or if there's no scope for a proper Halloween market (Fieldnotes, author 2).

Halloween, with origins in the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, has historically represented a liminal space where the boundary between the living (present) and the dead (past) is believed to blur and the spectres of the deceased to return (Kelly & Riach, 2020). Unsurprisingly, then, Halloween vernacular atmospheres have been steeped in symbols of fear and mystery, such as jack-o'-lanterns, skeletons and tombstones, evoking a sense of eeriness. However, as the fieldnote seems to suggest, these vernacular elements have, in the case of Manchester's HitC, been reimagined and infused with excitement, enjoyment and pleasure.

This reimagining is a familiar approach, as it reflects the idea that events and festivals can be powerful tools for re-activating the economic fortunes of places that may be struggling while enhancing the overall urban experience (Parker et al., 2017; Pine & Gilmore, 2019; Smith & Osborn, 2022; White et al., 2023). By transforming the typically utilitarian high street atmospheres, positive aspirations, desires and memories are produced as part of a wider consumer spectacle (Fisher, 2009, 2018; James et al., 2024). Staging such an event is inherently a hauntological practice, as its necessity also stems from the need to boost footfall and activity and re-activate the 'broken image' of the high street. Manchester's HitC has been praised for its success in this regard, emanating good vibes through the enactment of meaningful sensory experiences, such as carefully staged monster displays and playful theme park activities. Assembling these atmospheric elements and their affective resonances is part of a wider strategy to reposition Manchester's high street as an attractive, convivial, playful and safe place for families and young people (Bille et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2022). Hence, we have seen vernacular Halloween features and public spaces like St Ann's Square and Exchange Square being designed, staged and performed in newly-presented manners:

> Halloween can have a very scary attraction element to it, the scary and horror stuff. We weren't doing that kind of stuff … It's all

Table 1
Summary of interviews conducted.

Interview group	Interview	Institutional position (current or former)	Date	Duration (min.)
BID senior figures, officers and performers	1	Manchester BID manager in marketing and communication campaigns	28 November 2023	78
	2	Manchester BID manager in marketing and communication campaigns	28 November 2023	69
	3	Manchester BID Head of Events	07 December 2023	99
	4	Manchester BID Executive Director	21 December 2023	83
	5	Manchester BID project manager and city host	21 December 2023	81
	6	Former Manchester BID officer in Marketing	20 November 2023	18
	7	Manchester BID Executive Director	10 January 2024	67
	8	Halloween in the City Performer (Monsters Rock! Party procession)	10 January 2024	40
High street users	9	———	08 November 2023	32
	10	———	21 November 2023	46
	11	———	13 December 2023	30
	12	———	05 January 2024	37
	13	———	29 October 2023	18
	14	———	28 October 2023	20
	15	———	29 October 2023	15

supposed to be fun, friendly and open, welcoming and accessible (Interview #3)

Among the Halloween atmospheric elements, the inflatable monsters placed atop local businesses and entertainment venues clearly stood out. Their introduction, seen as colourful, entertaining and playful, generated sensory and rhythmic disruptions to everyday urban life, surprising visitors and encouraging playful interaction. Interestingly, the sensory and affective powers of such whimsical oversized creatures and pumpkin lanterns heightened at night, when they transformed into illuminated materials, drawing people into urban public spaces beyond usual time-spaces (Fig. 2) (Edensor, 2012; Edensor & Millington, 2018). These atmospheric elements both influenced perceptions and engagement in public spaces (Kolehmainen & Mäkinen, 2019) and evoked (positive) feelings of nostalgia while creating an illusion of authenticity as people feel they were experiencing the past (James et al., 2024; Södergren, 2022). These elements thus engendered affective and emotional resonances by allowing individuals to relive or reclaim past joys, such as the excitement of childhood Halloween celebrations. At the same time, they enabled people to create new memories within the city, often accompanied by a bittersweet sense of loss and longing for a time that can no longer be fully recaptured:

> [I]t's a bit of being a kid again in that respect. I'm 34 and [my partner] is 33. We do it [monster-hunting] because it's fun … It's just stealing a bit of your childhood back and having a bit of fun with it (Interview #10)

Fig. 2. Daily-transient atmospheres: Inflatable monsters at New Cathedral Street and Exchange Square (left: 25 October 2023, 12:44 PM; right: 25 October 2023, 7:22 PM). Source: Author 1.

Young adults were not alone. Alongside the inflatable monster-hunting trail, a set of material conditions and performative circumstances was orchestrated to elicit positive affective and emotional responses (Ahlberg et al., 2021; Edensor, 2012; Edensor & Millington, 2018). Here, the gamification of the HitC was used to reinterpret and restage cultural practices from the past, such as disguising to blend in or ward off evil spirits, and divination games. These practices were transformed into team-based activities like Trick-or-Treat competitions, including elements like helter-skelter lighthouses, skeleton hoopla and costume contests. The staging of these features encouraged social interaction while offering adults a nostalgic return to more innocent times, perhaps rekindling memories of childhood Halloweens (Woods, 2021). This illustrates how atmospheres are co-produced by participants, their dispositions and performances (Edensor, 2012; Kolehmainen & Mäkinen, 2019; Paiva & Sánchez-Fuarros, 2021):

> New Cathedral Street. Near *Zara*, a tent is set up where friendly monsters greet visitors. As each child approaches, the monster cheerfully exclaims, "You've already earned 10 points for dressing up!". The children, delighted by the playful interaction, move on to the games. The monster waves them off with a warm, "Have a nice monster's day!" (Fieldnotes, author 1)

> [H]aving these games that families play and say, "You are part of this team, this is your identity for the day", has meant that more families come dressed up … I think it means people have a deeper connection to the event (Interview #3)

We witnessed akin human-material encounters in St. Ann's Square (Fig. 3). Here, playful interactive elements, like pumpkin lanterns, smoke machines, stilt performers dressed as pumpkins, monster cartoons, red lighting and Halloween-themed songs, turned a seemingly dull space into a playful, lively 'open-air spooky theme park' (Sumartojo & Pink, 2019; Thibaud, 2015). These and other sensory elements, though rooted in Halloween's spectral and supernatural dimensions, were reinterpreted, designed and re-assembled to elicit new spatial meanings and feelings of joy, excitement and happiness as ways to draw families and children to positively sense and navigate the high street (Brighenti & Pavoni, 2019; Brown et al., 2021; James et al., 2024; Paphitis, 2020):

> If you've got a child who's a very interactive type of person, it'll encourage more participation … He wanted to try everything and gather as many tokens as possible! … Hadn't there been that

Fig. 3. Disrupting ordinary public spaces: St. Ann's Square before the event (top: 27 September 2023, 4:13 PM) and during the event (bottom: 28 October 2023, 6:23 PM). Source: Author 2.

> competitive element, we'd have looked at one or two of the activities, wandered off and come home (Interview #12)

As expected, the assembling of such atmospheric-making practices drew upon the affective- and emotional-amplification valences of novelty, unexpectedness and surprise to generate renewed excitement and engagement, especially for repeat visitors (Skavronskaya et al., 2021). For instance, 'familiar' sensory elements, like the colour, lighting or placement of the inflatable monsters, are frequently reconfigured each year, ensuring that returning attendees encounter something new while reinforcing the event's market position (White et al., 2023):

> [W]e get families coming for repeat visits every year to see the new monsters and what's different on the ground … You know, you can make Exchange Square look a bit different each year. In St. Ann's Square, there's always something new and a bit different. It's just about moving things around and the odd new thing keeps it fresh (Interview #5)

The careful staging of HitC brings forth a feeling of anticipation for the future that actually is (Derrida, 1994), while also highlighting the hauntological interplay between past and present, where past memories and experiences shape the anticipation of present-day atmospheres (Brighenti & Kärrholm, 2018b; Edensor, 2012; Steadman et al., 2021). These were made perceptible through the sensory and affective stimuli emanating from the much-heralded Monsters Rock! Party procession, which follows a planned route around and inside Manchester Arndale, the inner-city shopping centre. This music and dance performance captivated audiences with its larger-than-life skeletons, monstrous puppets and a five-piece brass-and-drums band playing Halloween-themed tunes. Here, a particularly striking sensory and affective moment occurred during the one-time performance of Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, which generated a strong sense of collective effervescence and excitement, shifting audience mood, attention and body rhythms (Adey et al., 2013; Hill et al., 2022). While the children were especially captivated by the giant creatures interacting with them, the music created a deeper resonance for the adult audience. The familiar beats and choreography of *Thriller* invoked nostalgia and a sense of connection between the past and future. Specifically, the song's iconic rhythm generated an auditory reliance on an old future (Fisher, 2018), evoking feelings of nostalgia and melancholy, as it recalled a time when this music represented futuristic possibilities that now feel both familiar and distant (Adams et al., 2020; Anderson & Hamilton, 2024). Hence, this staging and performance produced a collective atmosphere that fostered a shared emotional resonance:

> I think [adult] people definitely recognise that song. With *Thriller* in particular that's the only time when we do that choreography. So, in different sections [of the Procession], we might repeat different songs, but *Thriller* is always just for that part. That's just the set choreography for that part (Interview #8)

> The sound of instruments fills the air again, seamlessly transitioning into Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. It sparks immediate recognition among the adults … who instinctively move to the rhythm, swaying and dancing to the familiar beat. Children remain captivated by the towering monsters, which now engage more actively with them (Fieldnotes, author 1)

Through these encounters, where vernacular Halloween elements once grounded in fear and horror were reinterpreted and re-staged, the everyday activities, experiences and perceptions of the high street were seemingly disrupted and infused with feelings of joy, excitement and happiness. These practices of atmospheric production engendered positive affective and emotional connections, potentially reshaping how people perceive, navigate and consume Manchester's high street (Buser, 2017; James et al., 2024; Kjeldgaard & Bode, 2017). However, the need to conform and surrender to the nostalgic consumption of HitC also brings forth an "eerie atmospheric excess" (McPherson, 2024: 4) that is inherently hauntological.

4.2. Unearthing and consuming Manchester's high street hauntological atmospheres

In the previous section, we outlined the practices through which vernacular Halloween sensory elements were reinterpreted, redesigned and re-staged to produce positive affective and emotional connections with Manchester's high street. Now, we further extend the indeterminate and always-in-making nature of atmospheres (Bille et al., 2015; Edensor, 2012; Steadman et al., 2021) to argue that the original intentions and planned practices of atmospheric production can be disrupted by the emergence of unanticipated and disharmonious sensory stimuli (Coffin & Chatzidakis, 2021). Such disruptions can evoke feelings of discomfort, disorientation, dissonance and even anxiety (Ahlberg et al., 2021; Anderson & Hamilton, 2024; Brown et al., 2021; James et al., 2024; Paphitis, 2020). This sense of estrangement or dissonance emerged when fragmented, incomplete and unresolved aspects of the past and future intruded into the present, complicating the otherwise curated atmosphere. Hence, the carefully-curated, pleasurable Halloween atmospheres were occasionally overshadowed by more unsettling sensations, creating emotional tension among those producing and those experiencing the event.

While the planned Halloween atmospheres drew upon

reinterpretations of past cultural elements in pleasant ways to reposition Manchester's high street as a cool place, other, unplanned atmospheres emerged. These instances of what Paiva & Sánchez-Fuarros (2021: 392) term "collateral atmospheres" arose where the presence of the past and future, both in its planned and unplanned forms, permeated the present in disorienting and unsettling ways. These collateral atmospheres created sensory and rhythmic disturbances for visitors by complicating their engagement with the high street and creating moments of estrangement or tension. In this sense, while the BID's planned Halloween atmospheres aimed to evoke nostalgia and positive emotions, a particular kind of collateral atmospheres emerged, which we termed hauntological atmospheres. These atmospheres emerged in Manchester's HitC when atmospheric elements from the past and future collided in unexpected, unresolved or disharmonious ways, disrupting the intended mood and eliciting feelings of anxiety, eeriness and disorientation. To explore these issues, we introduce three instances of hauntological atmospheres that emerged during the HitC event: the atmospheres of retail ruins, the encroaching of Christmas markets and public protests. Collectively, each of these examples illustrates how atmospheres are porous entities shaped by multi-temporal tensions, where the affective presence of spectres from the past, along with anticipations of the future, are always present, influencing how we emotionally and cognitively engage and experience the high street.

4.2.1. Hauntological atmospheres of Manchester's high street I: Retail ruins

First, we focus on much-known retail ruins which have been emblematic of the decline of high streets in recent decades (Hubbard, 2017; Hughes & Jackson, 2015; White et al., 2023). These ruins are made perceptible through human and non-human encounters "in 'dead' or 'zombie' shopping malls, sputtering high streets, vanishing department stores and other scenes of vacancy, abandonment, dereliction and disarray" (Miller, 2023: 1). Such spaces represent a haunting materiality, where traces of a once-functional past linger, even if some aspects of the infrastructure continue to operate. St. Ann's Square, a historical area renowned for its Victorian and Edwardian architecture, is illustrative of this transformation of retail capital. Once Manchester's prime retail and business quarter alongside King Street, its prestige in the city's retailscape faded with the opening of the Arndale shopping centre in 1975 and the Trafford Centre in 1998. Today, retail vacancies show no signs of abating in these areas (Warnaby, 2019; Warnaby & Medway, 2021). As we walked through the square, the presence of boarded-up windows, outdated signage, for lease/sale signs and other vernacular retail practices engendered negative affective experiences, including feelings of abandonment and dereliction (Adams et al., 2020; Anderson & Hamilton, 2024; Miller, 2023). These elements produced what we term hauntological atmospheres of the high street (Fig. 4). Notably, the sensory and affective stimuli emanating from these elements highlight how once-vibrant shopping destinations have become ghosts of their former selves in the face of changing retail environments, evoking a tangible sense of haunting, mortality and unease about their uncertain or cancelled futures within the spatial division of consumption (Brown et al., 2021; Miller, 2023).

Adjacent 19th-century arcades, including St. Ann's, Royal Exchange and Barton, with their vernacular architecture, landscape features and non-Halloween-y shops awaiting customers, add to this eerie juxtaposition, blending historical architecture with modern retail indifference (Warnaby, 2019). The tensions between traditional and contemporary practices of atmospheric production create dissonance, with some shops embracing Halloween decor, while others subtly resist the planned atmosphere (Coffin & Chatzidakis, 2021; Warnaby & Medway, 2013). The result is a high street where past and present collide, and the lingering spectres of its former retail grandeur generate uncanny affects and emotional tensions. Hence, the unresolved past is made perceptible and continues to disrupt the present, underscoring how the spectral elements of St. Ann's Square create a sense of mortality and anxiety over Manchester's present and future consumerscapes (Brown et al., 2021; Cachinho, 2014; Kelly & Riach, 2020).

Other examples of retail ruins further illuminate the mundane drama of retail capital and deconstruct the present affective and emotional resonances of the 'retail apocalypse' in the aftermath of the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic that haunt the present high street experience. These revealed other instances of hauntological atmospheres, particularly made perceptible as the planned Monsters Rock! Party procession proceeded along Market Street towards its end inside the Arndale shopping centre. These atmospheres emerged from the assemblage of crypt-like materials, including broken windows, graffiti, scaffolding, fences, white covers, outdated signage and inner darkness surrounding the once-thriving retail premises of Debenhams (Market Street) and Wilko (Arndale shopping centre). Originally built in 1932 as a textile warehouse, Debenhams opened in the 1970s and soon became a cornerstone of Manchester's retailscape. However, since its closure in 2021 in the aftermath of COVID-19 and its ongoing renovation, the once-proud department store now appears eerily draped in scaffolding and white covers, standing as a phantasmagoric backdrop for the procession (Fig. 5). Suspended between past grandeur and an unresolved future, Debenhams now stands as a poignant symbol of retail capital uncertainty (Brown et al., 2021; James et al., 2024; Miller, 2023).

In contrast, Wilko, vacant for only a few weeks at the time of writing, joins the ranks of other high street casualties like Woolworths, with

Fig. 4. Empty retail premises in St. Ann's Square: Former 114-year-old clothing shop Austin Reed closed in 2016, 29 October 2023, 2:46 PM. Source: Author 2.

Fig. 5. Debenhams department store opened (left: 13 February 2019. Source: http://www.moneybright.co.uk/) and its ruins during Monsters Rock! Party Procession on Market Street (right: 29 October 2023, 3:56 PM. Source: Author 1).

experts predicting its eventual demise. These spaces, once vital to Manchester's retailscape, now stand as haunting relics, suspended in a state of liminality. The spectral presence of these decayed spaces generated a ghostly atmosphere for the HitC event, occupying a liminal position "betwixt existence and non-existence, absence and presence, visibility and invisibility" (Brown et al., 2021: 419). As such, these vacant stores evoke a profound sense of temporal dislocation, where the past refuses to fully vanish, unsettling the present with reminders of what once was but can no longer be. Hence, these retail ruins not only embody a haunting of the past but also actively 'do the haunting' themselves (Miller, 2023). For instance, the Monsters Rock Party! procession culminated outside the empty Wilko store, as playful music from *Monster Mash* echoed in the background, amplifying the hauntological atmosphere. Notably, this space-time created a "spectro-poetic" scene (Derrida, 1994: 56), where performers playfully teased the ghosts of the retail past. The event thus introduced an uneasiness to the high street's atmosphere, where even the entertainment spectacle cannot fully erase the eerie presence of these decayed spaces (Supplementary material 1). Witnessing these retail ruins amidst the spectacle of HitC evoked a complex emotional response, where *Schadenfreude* (pleasure in the misfortune of others) mingled with a deeper sense of loss and uncertainty. Simultaneously, as some of these empty spaces were momentarily filled with life, only to revert to vacancy afterwards, the unresolved tension between Manchester's glorious retail past and its uncertain future became perceptible:

> It's a vacant unit, you know? It's funny as I'd seen it empty days before. Then, seeing it all done up the way it was, it's quite a sight. I've passed by it since then and seen it empty again. It's a shame it sits empty when … it'd be a valuable asset to the city (Interview #11)

4.2.2. *Hauntological atmospheres of Manchester's high street II: Christmas atmospheres*

The assembling of Christmas-themed materials in public spaces and on the façades of some retail premises during the HitC emerged as a second example of hauntological atmospheres, where temporal layers overlap and collide, producing atmospheres imbued with a sense of dissonance and uncanniness. Sensory and affective stimuli emanating from the Christmas-themed elements, such as wooden structures housing market stalls on King Street, ice rinks adjacent to the Christmas markets at Cathedral Gardens and corporate-sponsored decorations (some of which also sponsored an inflatable monster), disrupted the otherwise intended Halloween atmosphere. This collision between seasonal cues created a disjointed, unsettling experience for those navigating the high street:

> I found it funny on Harvey Nichols. It's a place that sells high-quality goods and has the slimy one [monster] on the top of it … I saw that [Christmas decorations], walked up to the lovely gent who runs the watch repair shop and said, "You got the monster up! What's with the Christmas stuff?! Let Halloween go first!". He was like, "I don't know why they've done this. Apparently, it's come up from [upper] management" (Interview #10)

> The contrast in atmospheres is striking. A family dressed in matching "Boo Crew" T-shirts strolled through, fully embracing the Halloween spirit. However, just a few feet away, another individual was drawn to the Christmas decorations on Harvey Nichols' storefront, admiring the festive ornaments already in place (Fieldnotes, author 2).

Placing these contradictory materials within the same environment distorted the expected sensory experience tied to each season, generating a sense of temporal confusion and cognitive dissonance for those passing through. Instead, the collision of the past (Halloween) and the future (Christmas) created an eerie, disjointed space in the present, evoking what seemed to be an uncanny sensation. This uncanniness highlights the power-laden intricacies of atmospheric production in public spaces (Coffin & Chatzidakis, 2021; Warnaby & Medway, 2013). It outlines how various public and private stakeholders, each driven by different interests, operate within overlapping boundaries, potentially affecting atmospheric production and experience in unexpected ways. In particular, the juxtaposition of city council-led prioritisation of Christmas markets over Halloween decorations and corporate strategies, such as Harvey Nichols' Christmas branding, illustrates how competing interests manifest in overlapping sensory stimuli.

Interestingly, hauntological atmospheres are not always accidental but can also be understood as a calculated strategy to influence consumer behaviour and encourage Christmas-related spending. This serves as a reminder that our emotional and cognitive experiences of public spaces are also a result of conflicting, overlapping agendas, in which the past and future are mobilised to haunt the present in ways that unsettle and influence the high street experience. In the case of HitC, the commodified future, represented by Christmas, seemed to haunt the present, transforming dissonant atmospheres into a tool for manipulating consumer behaviour towards Christmas spending, while leaving the 'locally' intended Halloween atmospheres in a state of unresolved tension.

4.2.3. *Hauntological atmospheres of Manchester's high street III: Protest atmospheres*

Our third and final example demonstrates that economic forces are not alone in producing hauntological atmospheres. The *All Out for Palestine* protest, held on October 28, 2023, in response to the violence in Gaza and the West Bank following the Hamas-led assault on Southern Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent Israeli invasion of Gaza, illustrates how political forces also shape public spaces, engendering atmospheres thick with historical resonance and unresolved trauma. This protest, marked by chants of "Palestine will be free" and an array of materials like loudspeakers, banners, cardboard signs and newspapers, interrupted the intended Halloween atmosphere the BID had sought to produce (Fig. 6). The playful and positive nostalgic reverberations of Halloween were overshadowed by a more sombre haunting, one driven by the spectres of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This disruption brought unresolved ghosts of colonial histories, displacement and violence into a space originally designed to elicit playful and convivial atmospheres (Good et al., 2022; Goulding & Pressey, 2023; Paphitis, 2020).

The protest did more than disrupt pedestrian flows between St. Ann's Square and New Cathedral Street. It embodied 'ghosts' of political history, forcing the high street to confront repressed or forgotten memories and histories. In this moment, the past reasserted itself hauntologically in the present, where unresolved conflicts reemerged in sensorial and affective ways that unsettled the present. As expected, the visual and sonic disturbances emanating from protestors' chants reverberated through the high street, unsettling those not expecting or unprepared for such sensory stimuli. The protest embodied eerie dissonance and estrangement: the protestors' demands for liberation juxtaposed against the planned Halloween event. This clash between atmospheres – the playful, nostalgic and spooky ambiance of Halloween and the sombre, urgent atmosphere of protest – produced an uncanny experience, transforming the familiar high street into something strange and disorienting:

> My smile disappeared … Thousands of people were walking along Market Street shouting "Palestine will be free!". The police were escorting the protest. I started to feel nervous… I overheard comments like "Many people are upset about this". Once the police squad had passed, people crossed the two streets (Fieldnotes, author 1)

> Traditionally, protest groups would liaise with authorities and give an idea of what they're doing, where they're going and for how long. That's not the case now … [T]hat affects the experience of the event. I've spoken to friends who've said, "I didn't like the atmosphere in the city" or "I don't want to go back in because I didn't feel safe" (Interview #7)

Fig. 6. "Palestine will be free" march on Market Street. View from Exchange Street over New Cathedral Street. 28 October 2023, 2:12 PM. Source: Author 1.

These quotes illustrate how the protest acted as a form of temporal dislocation, where the unresolved histories of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict disrupted the linear flow of time, reminding high street users that these issues are not confined to the past, but continue to shape the present and demand future resolution. While this illustrates the temporal porosity and tensions of atmospheres (Edensor, 2012; Steadman et al., 2021), it also emphasises how public spaces remain contested sites (Carmona, 2015, 2022; Zamanifard et al., 2018), where economic and political forces vie to shape the sensory, affective and cognitive experiences of those who pass through them. Although BIDs often appear as privately-managed organisations offering sanitised versions of public spaces, the hauntological atmospheres of protests reveal their limits in managing these places. Hence, public spaces cannot be fully detached from the social, political and historical realities that haunt them (Carmona, 2015, 2022; De Magalhães, 2014; Kudla, 2024). This invites us to consider the relevance of processes of implacement in the production of atmospheres, particularly in public spaces, as forgotten or silenced narratives and histories have the sensory and affective power to create disjunctures and redefine the intended atmospheres (Coffin & Chatzidakis, 2021; Warnaby & Medway, 2013). In this case, the spectre of unresolved geopolitical conflict shows how unanticipated bodies, activities and reactions become perceptible and disrupt the design, staging and performance of planned urban consumption atmospheres.

5. Discussion

Using the example of HitC, a marketing event staged by a private-led urban place management organisation, this paper has examined the design, staging and performance of Manchester's high street atmospheres, along with the experiences they evoked. It argues that these practices, whether planned or unplanned, are shaped by multi-temporal tensions, where elements from the past, present and future often conflict with one another. In so doing, the paper has extended beyond traditional spectral places, such as industrial ruins (Edensor, 2005, 2008; Hill, 2013) and heritage spaces (Buser, 2017; Goulding & Pressey, 2023), to encompass everyday urban places. It has responded to recent calls to explore the practicalities of atmospheric production (Steadman & Coffin, 2024; Sumartojo & Pink, 2019) and expanded our understanding of broader processes of urban political-economic restructuring. This includes addressing the 'wicked problem' of high street decline, particularly the uncertainty surrounding its ideal forms and functions, while repositioning high streets as primary arenas for material and experiential consumption in the future (Steadman & Millington, 2022; White et al., 2023). Within these broader intellectual discussions, the paper makes four points that contribute to wider debates on atmospheric production in the entrepreneurial city and the hypothetical death of the high street.

First, and building upon Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology, this paper provides a hauntological reading of the practices of producing high street atmospheres. Building on recent contributions (Bille et al., 2015; Brighenti & Kärrholm, 2018b; Edensor, 2012; Steadman et al., 2021), it outlines that atmospheres are spatial and temporal porous entities to argue that high street atmospheres are produced not just by present encounters but also made and re-made through the sensorial and affective influences of the spectres of "unidentifiable or even imaginary past(s)" (Edensor, 2005: 836) and future anticipations (Adams et al., 2020; Anderson & Hamilton, 2024), which we termed hauntological atmospheres. This approach acknowledges the multifaceted nature of the high street as a public space of consumption, eventalisation, politicisation, memory and materiality, which requires a nuanced understanding of the different and porous temporalities shaping its atmospheres (Smith & Osborn, 2022; Steadman & Millington, 2022). In doing so, the paper contributes to the usability of hauntology as a onto-affective framework to high street research and practice, adding a spectral atmospheric perspective at the intersection of haunted materialities (Miller, 2023) and temporal imaginations evoked by events like HitC, which aim to reposition high streets as thriving arenas for material and experiential consumption in late capitalism, supported by "affective excesses of marketing and consumption" (Ahlberg et al., 2021: 159).

Second, the paper details how Manchester BID, a business-led place management body, uses marketing events to reposition the high street within the spatial division of consumption, aiming to reactivate its vitality and viability (Florida et al., 2023; Hubbard, 2017; Ntounis et al., 2023). From this perspective, the paper examines the ways in which urban marketers, officers, performers and planners design, stage and perform convivial, familiar, playful and positively nostalgic atmospheres. These practices resonate with recent nostalgic consumption and retro-marketing studies, where cultural, folkloric and historical elements associated with Halloween, such as death, supernatural and return of the dead (Kelly & Riach, 2020), are reinterpreted within contemporary politico-economy orthodoxy and consumer spectacle to reshape visitors' understandings of the high street and create pleasant, non-disruptive and meaningful experiences (Ahlberg et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2021; James et al., 2024; Miller, 2023; Södergren, 2022). This paper presents these practices of atmospheric production as a potential response to growing concerns about high street decline, linked to the spatial restructuring of retail capital in the form of out-of-town shopping environments, online shopping and rising operational costs, often seen as the final nail in the coffin (Brown et al., 2021; Miller, 2023; Zanette et al., 2023). Thus, our analysis of the atmospheres produced through HitC, originally designed to foster positive affective and emotional connections with Manchester's high street (Kolehmainen & Mäkinen, 2019; Thibaud, 2015; Viderman & Knierbein, 2020), carries a hidden optimism. Our findings confirm that repositioning high streets for material and experiential consumption highlights a significant change in people's perceptions and attitudes (Brown, 2021; Brown et al., 2021; Buser, 2017). The re-staged nostalgia of HitC is thus an effective place management strategy in this regard.

Third, the territorial production of hauntological high street atmospheres does not occur within fixed, stable and bounded space-times (Bille et al., 2015; Buser, 2017; Edensor, 2012; Steadman et al., 2021; Sumartojo & Pink, 2019). More fundamentally, the paper outlines how formal and planned practices of atmospheric production, reinterpreting and recontextualising cultural and historical to evoke positive emotions and spatial meanings, are often disrupted by other, collateral atmospheres (Brown et al., 2021; James et al., 2024; Paiva & Sánchez-Fuarros, 2021). To substantiate this, the paper offers three examples of hauntological atmospheres to further emphasise the importance of spatial and temporal grammars in atmosphere-making. For example, past economic and political influences, such as retail ruin atmospheres and protest atmospheres, as well as future anticipations like Christmas atmospheres, intermingle and shape present-day high street atmospheres (Adams et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021; Fisher, 2009; Miller, 2023). This further demonstrates that atmospheres are never fully planned or stable; they are open to unforeseen and unresolved forces, encounters and eerie dissonance, emerging from multi-temporal tensions (Bille et al., 2015; Coffin & Chatzidakis, 2021; Fisher, 2016; Kolehmainen & Mäkinen, 2019). This discussion creates an opening for "spaces, or at least economic spaces that have a better awareness of, and respect for, socio-cultural and other kinds of difference" (Miller, 2023: 119). It also highlights the complex, power-laden nature of high street atmospheric production, particularly where private-led organisations, like BIDs, attempt to create welcoming, enjoyable consumption atmospheres (Miller & Laketa, 2019; Silva & Cachinho, 2021; Zamanifard et al., 2018). While US BIDs have been criticised for sanitising urban spaces from undesirable groups and limiting the openness of public spaces (Kudla, 2024), this paper shows that these powers are more restricted under English BID regulations (Carmona, 2015, 2022; De Magalhães, 2014). For instance, the emergence of protest atmospheres partly disrupted Manchester BID's attempts to create carefully planned atmospheres. While these planned atmospheres are, of course, intended to be welcoming and enjoyable for businesses, consumers and visitors, they also suggest that marginalised or overlooked groups, usually excluded from formal atmosphere-making practices, hold the power to engage with, disrupt or even redefine the consumption atmospheres in public spaces.

Finally, the paper illustrates the usability of a hauntological framework to study the 'wicked problem' of (British) high street decline and the potentialities that are unearthed from a multi-temporal analysis of high street atmospheres related to high street reinvention and differentiation (Ntounis et al., 2023; Steadman & Millington, 2022). Amid ongoing policy attempts to save central areas facing commercial, experiential and socio-economic challenges (more recently Built Environment Committee, 2024), a hauntological framing can bring forward a different approach situated in historical perspectives that highlight the high street's ability to reproduce and change accordingly over successive generations (Hill et al., 2022; Schroer & Schmitt, 2018). Further research is thus required to highlight, for example, how hauntological atmospheres can help us understand "high streets as loci of continuity and change" (Griffiths, 2015: 50) by examining flagship events or more mundane, everyday activities and places from a hauntological lens. Moreover, from a policy lens, a hauntological reading of the high street can uncover the hindrances, scars and (im)material consequences of past and present policies and practices on place management organisations' attempts to reactivate central places (Lea, 2024).

6. Conclusion

This paper studied the practices of producing and consuming eventualised high street atmospheres within the context of prevailing narratives of decline and death. Drawing on walking methods and semi-structured interviews with senior figures from Manchester's BID and high street users, the research examined the practices through which this urban place management organisation staged and performed one of its most prominent events to reinforce the repositioning of the high street as a primary arena for material and experiential consumption. Specifically, the paper detailed how the BID, through its HitC event, carefully and purposefully reinterpreted, redesigned and re-staged vernacular Halloween sensory elements as part of a wider strategy to reshape users' understandings of the high street. These practices of atmospheric production aimed to foster positive affective and emotional connections, constructing the high street as attractive, convivial, playful and safe, particularly for families and younger visitors.

By mobilising Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology to the study of atmospheric design, staging and performance in everyday urban places, this paper extended the theorisation of atmospheres as inherently porous entities shaped by multi-temporal tensions. In particular, it introduced the concept of hauntological atmospheres to describe a specific set of atmospheres that emerge from the disharmonious, fragmented, incomplete and unresolved affective presence of past influences, as well as anticipations of the future, which permeate the present through sensory and rhythmic disruptions. As the paper demonstrated, the making-up of these atmospheres, in its planned or unplanned forms, has the power to disrupt the wider ambitions of the BID to carefully curate pleasurable Halloween atmospheres and complicate how the high street is emotionally and cognitively experienced.

Through the cases of retail ruins, Christmas decorations and protests, the paper illustrated how hauntology offers a productive onto-affective framework for understanding the multifaceted and often contradictory forces at play in atmospheric production. This framework further echoes the power-laden, multi-temporal struggles inherent in atmospheric-making, ultimately shaping how businesses, consumers and visitors engage with and experience high streets, particularly in the context of their perceived decline and death.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Diogo Gaspar Silva: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Software, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Nikos Ntounis:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Daniel Paiva:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

Declaration of ethics

The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee – Hauntological Atmospheres of the UK High Street: Consuming Manchester's Halloween in the City (EthOS ID 59312)

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Declaration of competing interest

None.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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