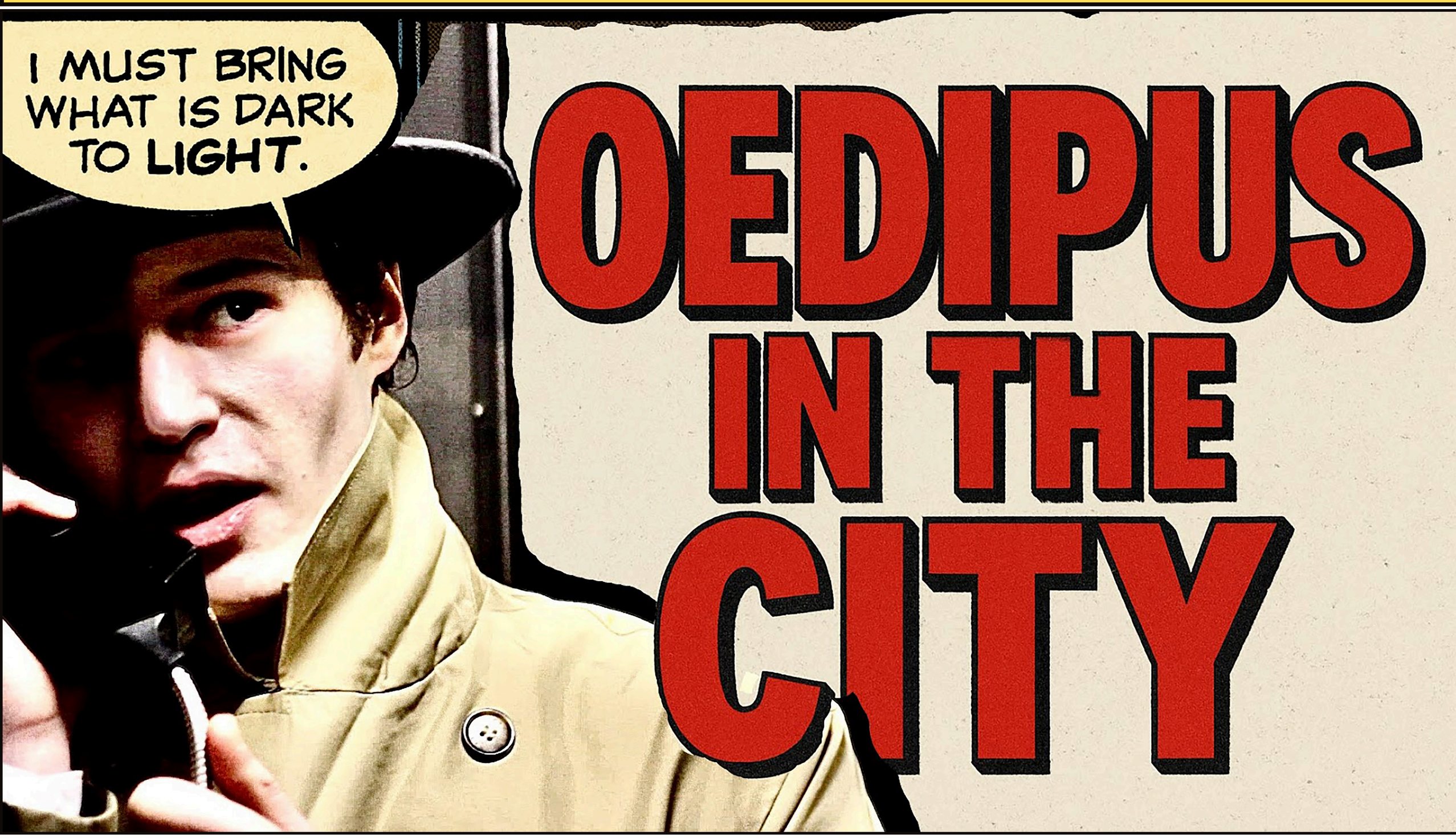
THE ROLE OF IMAGE AND PERFORMATIVE PROCESS IN SHADOW-WORK AND DEVELOPING A MENTALIZING STANCE WITHIN DRAMATHERAPY

AN ARTS-BASED AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION SUMMARISED IN A FICTIONAL SHORT FILM
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BACKGROUND OVERVIEW

This research formed part of my MSc Dramatherapy dissertation, conducted during a practice-based learning module in which dramatherapy was applied within a Mentalization-Based Treatment (MBT) framework. Dramatherapy and MBT both aim to enhance reflective functioning and relational awareness. While MBT emphasises a sustained reflective stance throughout the therapeutic process, dramatherapy typically differentiates between phases of engaging in metaphor and the 'life–drama connection' that occurs post-embodiment, following de-roling.

Working within this placement context demanded ongoing examination of my internal responses, implicit assumptions and emerging identity as a dramatherapist. This required engagement with elements of my Shadow and with emotional material that did not readily surface through direct reflection. Arts-Based Research (ABR) provided an approach that allowed me to work 'obliquely', using image-making, performance and film to externalise and explore unconscious processes.



RESEARCH QUESTION

How can visual and performative arts-based practices support the mentalization of my professional identity, as I explore the integration of MBT principles into Dramatherapy within a practice-based learning context?

FINDINGS

Imagery and performance facilitated shadow work, enabling unconscious emotional themes to surface safely and be contained through the use of the metaphor.

The filmmaking process created aesthetic distance, supporting mentalization by allowing me to observe my responses, patterns, and internal states from an external, third-person position.

The Oedipus myth unexpectedly mirrored my own self-inquiry journey, becoming a powerful container for themes of guilt, responsibility, fear of shame and identity.

By working at the edges of my Shadow, this arts-based inquiry transformed uncertainty into understanding, and vulnerability into reflective strength.

Despite the limited literature on the combined application of Dramatherapy and MBT, there is clear potential for meaningful integration between the two frameworks.

WATCH THE SHORT FILM

VIDEO OF MY CREATIVE PROCESS

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METHOD

This project employed Arts-Based Research and Autoethnography and introduced a hybrid method that I term Psychodynamic Dramaturgy, an original approach to adapting a play into a short film through a deeply personal lens.

The process involved:

-Altered playtext: the projection of emotional material onto the pages of a theatre play, using Oedipus Rex as an archetypal container for themes of investigation, blindness, personal insight, the unseen self as object of inquiry and repressed truth.

-Using techniques such as blackout poetry and collage on the pages of the play text to externalise unprocessed affect.

-Reflecting on the symbols in imagery and words, distilling them and

-Rewriting scenes for a short film, while creating a fictional story paralleling my research process.

-Embodied, performative experimentation and role work: filming scenes with professional actors.

-Viewing and reflection: using the film footage as a reflective surface to observe my involvement from an external vantage point.

-Short film creation: producing an artefact synthesising insight, symbol, and emotional material through the final cut.

