

THE NEW YORKER

Now Playing

UNCANNY VALLEY

A robot that looks like a person? That's unnerving enough. But what about an automaton that dreams like us and dances like us? Thomas Gibbons's modestly speculative play explores where technology ends and humanity begins. Or maybe it's the other way around. Alex Podulke, in a precision-tooled performance, plays Julian, a very handsome assemblage of biomimetic polymers. Barbara Kingsley is Claire, the scientist charged with preparing those polymers to become the synthetic vessel for a dying billionaire's memories and habits of mind. Under Tom Dugdale's variable direction, the "Pygmalion"-like scenes of Julian's education—how to smile, how to make small talk—are eerily charming, and Podulke and Kingsley achieve an affectionate rapport. But in the last half hour the wheels of the plot begin to spin more quickly, and the play's ambitious ideas seem quashed by the tidy two-actor, single-set format.