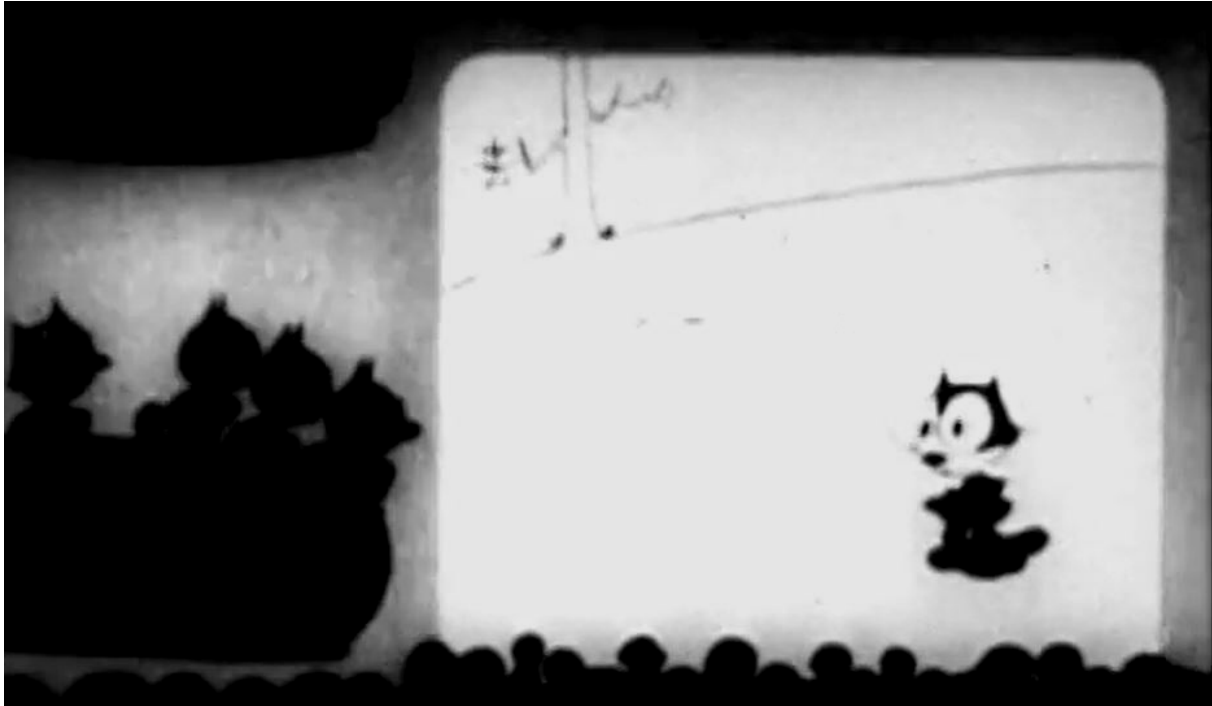






successful American animation studio of the 1920s, all due to the creation and subsequent fame of Felix the Cat. By ‘fame,’ I do not mean fame of the fifteen-minutes Warholian sort, but genuine international fame that lasted more than a decade. Felix wittily acknowledges his own fame in the 1927 cartoon *Flim Flam Films*, in which house-husband Felix takes his three kittens to the cinema. They have trouble gaining entry because of the ‘no cats admitted here’ policy, but eventually sneak in. The curtain rises to reveal the first item: a Felix cartoon. The kittens cry out delightedly ‘Look, there’s Daddy!’



**Figure 1: ‘Look, there’s Daddy!’ Frame from *Flim Flam Films*, 1927.**

In *Felix Out of Luck* (the 1921 Paramount original, not the 1924 Margaret J. Winkler cartoon of the same title)<sup>2</sup> Felix, the common man/cat, loses his sweetheart to a sophisticated artist from New York. However, in his dual role of artistic creation and cartoon character, Felix typically negotiated an on-screen merger of the high- and low-brow versions of modernism, and perhaps even a real-life truce between New York’s bohemian artists and hard-working animators. Patricia Vettel Tom acknowledges Felix’s rightful place in any analysis of aesthetic/high modernism: ‘like modernist painting, early animation was also a visual response to modernity, sharing with “high” modernism such concerns as self-referentiality and physical and societal transgression’ (65). Vettel Tom opens her essay with a reference to Victor De Bann’s ‘The Art of the Motion Picture,’ an illustration that first appeared in *Life*, 22 December 1927. Both Vettel Tom and Donald Crafton (3) illustrate this eight-frame quasi-cubist view of a couple’s night out at a New York picture-palace. Up grand staircases and through marble halls they go, until in the final frame they reach the darkened auditorium and their desired goal—not a Tom Mix western, not a Rudolph Valentino romance, but a screening of Felix the Cat.

As if being a movie star wasn’t enough, Felix was also the first figure to appear on American television. In 1928, RCA began experimental television broadcasts via W2XBS and needed a test subject that could sit patiently under strong lighting for hours on end without demanding food and toilet breaks. No human actor would do it, so a papier-mâché Felix was employed in this capacity for over a decade. Felix’s high-contrast black and white colouring is a plausible explanation for why the television technicians chose him from the array of toys available from























