

Fluxus and Artists' Publications: The Case of Grapefruit

Fluxus ve Sanatçı Yayınları: Grapefruit Örneği

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ABSTRACT

Fluxus artists sought to transform artistic production into a form that was more accessible, reproducible, and closely connected to everyday life by challenging art's dependence on institutional spaces, market relations, and traditional aesthetic hierarchies. Within this framework, the artists' publications were re-imagined as an experimental artistic space incorporating performance, play, instructions, everyday actions and audience participation. Fluxkits, Fluxboxes and Fluxbooks transcended the traditional page-based understanding of the book through the use of cards, objects, instructions, and interactive texts, thereby proposing alternative models of artistic production that challenged the status of the artwork as a singular, high-value commodity. This article examines Grapefruit, the artist's publication independently published and distributed by conceptual artist, activist, and musician Yoko Ono in 1964. Employing a descriptive and interpretive approach, the study situates the work within the broader objectives of Fluxus artists' publications, including accessibility, participation, engagement with everyday life, and a critical stance toward art institutions. The research draws upon interviews with the artist, autobiographical writings and exhibition catalogues. Rather than approaching Grapefruit solely as a physical book, this study considers it a conceptual and performative structure that invites readers to act, reflect and participate in the process of meaning-making. As an early example of Ono's instruction-based artistic practice, the work is realized through the active participation of its readers. Instead of presenting a completed and static art object, Ono constructs an experiential and conceptual process that emerges through participation. Independent of exhibition spaces and open to enactment in any location, Grapefruit exemplifies the alternative models of artistic production developed by Fluxus through publishing, circulation, and participation.

Keywords: Fluxus, artists' publications, Yoko Ono, grapefruit

ÖZ

Fluxus sanatçıları, sanatın kurumsal mekânlara, piyasa ilişkilerine ve geleneksel estetik hiyerarşilere bağımlı yapısını sorgulayarak sanat üretimini daha erişilebilir, çoğaltılabilir ve gündelik yaşama yakın bir forma dönüştürmeyi amaçlamışlardır. Bu doğrultuda çeşitli sanatçı yayınları performans, oyun, talimat, gündelik eylem ve izleyici katılımını içeren deneysel bir sanat alanı olarak yeniden kurgulanmıştır. Fluxkit, fluxbox, fluxbook olarak çeşitlendirilebilecek olan bu üretimler, sayfa düzenine dayalı klasik kitap anlayışını aşarak çoğu zaman kartlar, objeler, talimatlar ve etkileşimli metinlerden oluşmuş, böylece sanat yapısının tekil ve piyasa değeri yüksek bir nesne olarak konumlandırılmasına karşı alternatif bir üretim modeli geliştirmiştir. Bu makalede, kavramsal sanatçı, aktivist ve müzisyen Yoko Ono'nun 1964 yılında bağımsız olarak yayımladığı ve dağıttığı Grapefruit adlı sanatçı yayını, Fluxus'un yayınlar aracılığıyla hedeflediği erişilebilirlik, katılımcılık, gündelik yaşamla ilişki kurma ve sanat kurumlarına karşı eleştirel mesafe alma stratejileri bağlamında betimsel ve yorumlayıcı bir yöntemle analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın verileri, sanatçıyla söyleşilerden, sanatçının otobiyografik metinlerinden, sergi kataloglarından elde edilen belgelerin incelenmesi yoluyla toplanmıştır. Çalışmada Grapefruit, yalnızca fiziksel bir kitap değil, okuru eyleme geçmeye, düşünmeye ve yapının anlam üretim sürecine katılmaya davet eden kavramsal ve performatif bir yapı olarak ele alınmaktadır. Yoko Ono'nun talimata dayalı sanat pratiğinin erken örneklerinden biri olan bu sanatçı yayını, içerdiği talimatlar aracılığıyla ancak okuyucunun etkin katılımıyla tamamlanmaktadır. Sanatçı, tamamlanmış ve durağan bir meta değil, izleyiciyle ortaklaşa şekillenen deneysel ve düşünsel bir süreç kurgulamaktadır. Bu deneyim, izleyicilerin kendi başına ve istediği yerde yapabileceği, sergi mekânlarına bağımlı olmayan bir karşılaşma anı yaratmaktadır. Bu özellikleriyle Grapefruit, Fluxus'un yayıncılık, dolaşım ve katılımcılık ekseninde geliştirdiği alternatif sanat üretim modellerinin özgün örneklerinden biri olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fluxus, sanatçı yayınları, Yoko Ono, greyfurt



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Introduction

Emerging most prominently from the early 1960s onward, Fluxus developed a critical stance toward the privileged and elitist status that institutional structures had assigned to art. For this reason, they developed art practices that are more accessible, easier, and cheaper to produce and reproduce like artists' publications. The strong connection between Fluxus and publishing practices can be traced to George Maciunas's initial conception of Fluxus as a magazine in 1962–1963. Designed by Maciunas and developed through proof prints produced together with artist Dick Higgins, this publication was intended to be titled *Fluxus*. However, the magazine was never published after Maciunas's car, containing the printing drafts, was flooded. Beginning in 1963, the name *Fluxus* instead became a collective designation for boxes, performances, yearbooks, books, and other artistic productions, a usage that continues to the present day. Until his death in 1978, George Maciunas continued to produce various Fluxus publications, most notably *Fluxboxes*.

This article examines how artists' publications within the Fluxus movement established a pluralistic and non-hegemonic platform within the framework of the traditional art canon. More specifically, it aims to explore the position of the artist, activist, and musician Yoko Ono's artist's book *Grapefruit* within both Fluxus and the broader landscape of avant-garde artistic practices by offering a detailed analysis of the publication.

Grapefruit has been selected both because it constitutes one of the earliest and most foundational examples of Fluxus artists' publications and because it embodies many of the central concerns of the movement. Accordingly, the article first discusses Fluxus and its publishing activities through a historical overview. It then examines the structural characteristics of Ono's *Grapefruit*, its content, and the forms of engagement it establishes with its readers, interpreting these dimensions through the lens of Fluxus aesthetics and philosophy.

Method

This study is designed as a qualitative inquiry employing descriptive and interpretive methods. In this framework, the individual pieces contained in *Grapefruit* are described with reference to their formal characteristics, including linguistic style, instructional structures, and mechanisms of reader participation. These characteristics are then interpreted in relation to the strategies developed by Fluxus through artists' publications.

The analysis adopts four key dimensions frequently discussed in the literature on Fluxus artists' books (accessibility, participation, engagement with everyday life, and institutional critique) as its primary evaluative criteria. *Grapefruit* is examined through these dimensions. Accordingly, the study is structured as a case study based on an in-depth analysis of a single primary source. As one of the earliest and most frequently referenced examples of Fluxus's instruction-based artist's book practice, *Grapefruit* constitutes a highly representative case that enables a detailed examination of the relationship between form and artistic strategy.

The data for this research were gathered through the compilation of biographical texts, academic writings on the artist, and exhibition catalogues containing reproductions and discussions of her works. The information derived from these sources has been evaluated in relation to Ono's position within the Fluxus movement.

Fluxus and Artists' Publications

Fluxus was an art movement that emerged in the early 1960s as an alternative to the market oriented approach of the dominant art canon. Deriving its name from the Latin word *flux*, meaning *flow*, the movement embraced an approach that was, much like its name, unstable, continuously changing, evolving and transforming. By developing an aesthetic of resistance against the institutionalized art world, Fluxus sought to transform art from a commodity into an experience completed through audience participation.

In a letter to Tomas Schmit, Maciunas wrote: "Fluxus is anti-professional, that is, against professional art, against making money from art, and against artists devoting their entire lives and all of their time to art (as cited in Antmen, 2010, p. 208)." Accordingly, Fluxus opposed both the production of art as a commercial commodity and its function as a source of income for the artist.

Rejecting the notion of the artwork as a unique, expensive object accessible only to a limited audience, Fluxus sought alternative modes of artistic production and circulation. In this context, artists' publications such as *fluxkits*, *fluxboxes*, and *fluxbooks* became significant instruments of Fluxus's democratic conception of art due to their low production costs, reproducibility, and capacity to reach broad audiences. Produced through inexpensive printing techniques, employing ordinary materials from everyday life, and open to serial production, these publications undermined the assumption that artworks could only be experienced within galleries or museums. Art was thus displaced from institutional confines and woven directly into the fabric of everyday life, establishing a more immediate relationship with a wider public.

Fluxus developed an understanding of art that dissolved the boundaries between art and life, relocating artistic practice from elitist institutions into the streets and the sphere of everyday experience. Within this framework, even ordinary actions could become artistic acts, and individuals from all segments of society could engage in artistic production. Thus, distinctions between artistic disciplines were also eroded, giving rise to a fundamentally interdisciplinary approach. Maciunas identified the intellectual sources that shaped Fluxus as follows: "We took the idea of concreteness and noise from Futurism and Russolo. We took the ready-made from Marcel Duchamp. We took collage from the Dadaists. All these culminated in John Cage" (as cited in Antmen, 2010, p. 204).

In addition to the broader anti-art tendencies of the period, John Cage's experimental composition classes in New York played a crucial role in the development of Fluxus. Cage's practice departed radically from conventional artistic approaches. For Cage, music was not the sole focus of artistic production; rather, his work drew upon multiple disciplines and could be shaped through ordinary objects and actions, creating a form of theatrical performance. Silence was as significant as sound and language, and every sound encountered in daily life could become part of an artwork. A notable example is *4'33"*, a work that radically challenged traditional notions of musical composition. During the performance, musicians sit silently at the piano for the duration indicated in the title, producing no intentional sounds. Although the performance appears silent, Cage's aim was not to create absolute silence but rather to direct the

audience's attention toward the sounds already present within the environment. Coughs, breathing, and incidental noises occurring within the performance space thus constitute the actual content of the work. In this way, Cage demonstrated that music is not composed solely of intentionally organized sounds but can also encompass the accidental sounds of everyday life. At the same time, the audience becomes an integral component of the artwork, functioning simultaneously as composer and performer.

Cage's transformation of art from an expression of artistic genius into a practice that could be performed by anyone, coupled with his willingness to leave outcomes to interpretation and chance, laid the groundwork for the Event Scores that became central to Fluxus. Event Scores can be defined as concise instructional texts frequently employed by Fluxus artists, capable of being interpreted by readers and transformed into various actions or objects. Just as musical compositions rely upon instructions provided to performers so that a work may be realized at different times and places, Fluxus artists generally employed language rather than musical notation, enabling anyone to enact their instructions.

According to Natilee Harren, one of Fluxus's most significant contributions to contemporary art history was its adoption of the score format as a model not only for musical performance but for artistic production more broadly:

Utilized first in relation to Fluxus concert activities, the score offered Fluxus artists an alternative model of form that provided a logical basis for the creation of objects, a transformed understanding of artistic subjectivity, and an instrument for the collective's ongoing organization. Fluxus artists embraced scores before the rise of minimalism, post-minimalism, conceptualism, and new media art fully realized the "post-medium" condition of contemporary art, in which an artist's medium is defined not by a set of fixed materials but as a recursive structure made and remade in a kind of rule-based improvisation (Harren, 2020, p. 24).

Harren argues that Fluxus emerged at the center of the cultural transformations that characterized the 1960s and therefore offers an important key to understanding contemporary art.

Alongside John Cage's experimental compositions, one of the earliest examples of the score model is George Brecht's *Water Yam* (Image 1), a Fluxbox consisting of sixty-nine short instruction cards housed within a box designed by George Maciunas. The brevity of these instructions and their grounding in everyday actions reflect fundamental Fluxus principles. Each reader encounters the cards in a different sequence and consequently performs the actions differently, reinforcing Fluxus's emphasis on chance and indeterminacy. One of the best-known examples, *Drip Event*, closely parallels Cage's engagement with everyday sounds and randomness. The score instructs participants to place an empty container beneath a dripping water source. Since the sounds produced by the falling drops differ each time, every realization generates a unique composition. As Ahu Antmen notes, "The characteristic of these actions is their brevity, sometimes their instantaneous nature, and their focus on a single moment. Such actions were carried out to frustrate expectations, surprise spectators, and awaken them through surprise. Their primary aim was to enable a fresh perception of everyday reality (Antmen, 2010, p. 205)."

Image 1.

George Brecht, *Water Yam*, 1963



Image 2.

Benjamin Patterson, *Instruction No.2*, 1965



Benjamin Patterson's *Instruction No. 2* (Image 2) consists of a plastic box containing a towel and a bar of soap accompanied by the instruction "please wash your face." Patterson presents the reader with an object and invites them to perform an action with it. The work is completed only when the reader carries out the prescribed action; consequently, the artwork becomes a collaborative practice realized jointly by artist and participant. By encouraging spectators to engage physically with the object through touch and smell, the work establishes a direct sensory relationship between the participant and the artwork.

As these examples demonstrate, an inseparable relationship between performance and publishing lies at the heart of the Fluxus movement. Event Scores, one of the movement's foundational forms, were conceived not only as performances to be enacted but also as publications intended to be distributed and experienced independently by readers. Such publications fostered a "do-it-yourself" conception of art open to everyone (Dezeuze, 2002). In this sense, publishing in Fluxus did not merely document performance; rather, it democratized it, making it executable anytime and anywhere while erasing the distance between art and life.

Like Event Scores, productions known as *Fluxkits* offered primary experience (direct sensation) rather than secondary information (description) and operated according to a do-it-yourself logic. The first Fluxkit, *Fluxus 1*, designed by Fluxus founder and principal designer George Maciunas in 1962, consisted of a box containing objects, visual materials, and Event Scores by thirty-nine artists. Their low production costs and distribution through mail order or specialized stores known as Fluxshops enabled art to reach

broader audiences.

The various items in Fluxus 1 yield multisensory, primary information. These include a song, with words and melody (therefore involving sight, motility, and hearing); a napkin, meant to touch hand and mouth (therefore involving tactility and perhaps taste); a medical examination glove, with the look and smell of latex (therefore involving touch both in and through the glove sight, and smell); photo portraits, which appeal to the eye; performance and music scores, which involve all senses (and are thus synaesthetic); and visual and sound poems, meant to be read, heard, and performed (which therefore involve the eye, the ear, and the body of the performer) (Higgins, 2002, p. 34).

Another Fluxkit that foregrounded experience, and sensory engagement was Fluxus artist Ay-O's *Finger Box* (Image 3). The box contained a series of cubes with holes large enough for a finger to pass through, inviting spectators to insert their fingers into them. Although each cube appeared visually similar from the outside, participants encountered different materials inside each one. In this way, the work shifted emphasis away from visual observation and toward tactile discovery.

Image 3.

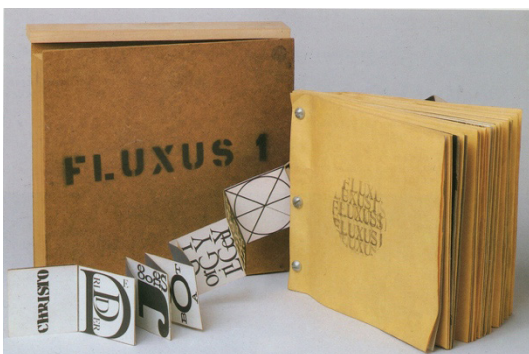
Ay-O, *Finger Box*, 1965



Alongside these distinctive Fluxkits, Fluxus also produced publications that served similar purposes while adhering more closely to conventional book formats. One example is George Maciunas's *Fluxus I* (1964) (Image 4), an artist's publication composed of a series of envelopes, each containing editioned works by a single artist, housed within a box. Included within the box was a folded sheet displaying typographically designed artist names created by Maciunas. In contrast to the traditional artwork, *Fluxus I* was portable, inexpensive, and fundamentally dependent upon audience participation.

Image 4.

George Maciunas, *Fluxus I*, 1964



An important contribution to Fluxus publishing came from *Something Else Press*, founded in 1963 by artists Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles. As a publishing house dedicated to books, newsletters, brochures, and early Fluxus poetry and texts, it became a crucial platform for disseminating the work of numerous Fluxus artists. Unlike Maciunas's publications, which often functioned as prototypes and were sold primarily through Fluxshops, *Something Else Press* advocated for a much broader circulation of artists' publications. To this end, it established a distribution network capable of reaching readers wherever books were sold, thereby providing an alternative platform to both mainstream publishing houses and commercial art galleries. Higgins described the press as "an organization run in a thoroughly professional manner by artists and writers committed, as its name implies, to providing alternatives to what the commercial sector proposes (Higgins, 1968, p. 1)."

One notable publication issued by *Something Else Press* was artist and writer Bern Porter's *Found Poems*. The book brings together excerpts from advertisements, instruction manuals, textbooks, and other forms of everyday printed matter alongside a broad selection of Porter's own poetry. Removed from their original contexts and rearranged to generate new meanings and narratives, these materials produce what has been described as "a visually and linguistically playful text that critiques both commercial interests and bureaucracy through humorous and ironic means (Printed Matter, n.d.)." Although *Found Poems* adopts the conventional form of a book, its content departs significantly from mainstream literary and publishing traditions.

Due to financial difficulties, *Something Else Press* declared bankruptcy and ceased operations in 1974. After leaving the press in 1973, Higgins continued his publishing activities by establishing cooperative publishing ventures through which artists could produce their own publications. First operating under the name *Unpublished Editions* and later *Printed Editions* from 1978 onward, these initiatives remained active until 1986 (Higgins, 1992).

Yoko Ono and Instruction-Based Artistic Practice

Born in Tokyo in 1933, conceptual artist, activist, and musician Yoko Ono spent her childhood and adolescence between Tokyo and the United States due to the disruptions of the Second World War. The conditions imposed by the war forced Ono and her family to relocate repeatedly, and these experiences of displacement would leave a profound mark on both her life and artistic practice. In 1952, after abandoning her studies in philosophy in Tokyo, Ono joined her family in the United States and enrolled at Sarah Lawrence College to study art. However, rejecting formal artistic education, she eventually left the institution of her own accord.

Ono's move to New York in 1957 marked a decisive moment in both her life and artistic career. The performances and events she organized in her Manhattan loft studio quickly attracted the attention of New York's avant-garde circles, and it was through these activities that she first met George Maciunas and became connected to the Fluxus movement.

These years coincided with the ascendancy of Abstract Expressionism and the rapid expansion of the art market in the United States. Yet artists such as John Cage, Nam June Paik, George Maciunas, and Yoko Ono were simultaneously developing experimental practices that stood in opposition to dominant artistic conventions. Carolyn S. Stevens describes Ono: "She is both 'Japanese' and 'not-Japanese.' She is an artist who has been both critically acclaimed and dismissed." And she characterizes her as

“a diva who transgresses social, national, sexual, and aesthetic boundaries” (Stevens, 2018). Indeed, Ono not only challenged the prevailing artistic paradigms of her time but also subverted the social expectations imposed upon Japanese women in her personal life.

Yoko Ono held her first exhibition in 1961 at George Maciunas’s AG Gallery. This exhibition brought together, for the first time, a series of instruction-based works that would become central to her artistic practice. Titled *Paintings and Drawings*, the exhibition featured some of the earliest examples of the instructional works that would later gain significance within the discourse of conceptual art. Pieces such as *Painting to Be Stepped On*, *Smoke Painting*, *Waterdrop Painting*, and *Painting to See in the Dark* challenged the conventional understanding of painting as a completed, stable, and untouchable object.

In *Painting to Be Stepped On*, for example, a cut piece of canvas placed on the floor is completed only when spectators step upon it. The artwork thereby ceases to be a distant object requiring preservation and instead becomes an action experienced through bodily contact. In *Smoke Painting*, spectators are instructed to burn the canvas with a cigarette. Participants may hold the cigarette against the surface for as long as they wish, allowing the movements of smoke and the resulting burn marks to become part of the work. The complete destruction of the canvas itself is understood as the moment of completion.

Ono’s characterization of this exhibition as the first presentation of her instruction-based paintings is significant because these works fundamentally reconfigured the relationship between artwork, artist, and spectator. Rather than functioning as surfaces merely to be observed, the paintings became processes open to duration, action, chance, and audience intervention. The spectator was no longer a passive observer but an active participant whose involvement made the realization of the work possible. Actions such as stepping on or burning the artwork reversed the modernist conception of the sacred and untouchable art object. Furthermore, Ono’s personal presence throughout the exhibition, during which she verbally communicated the instructions for each work to visitors, reinforced the performative dimension of these pieces.

A similar emphasis on audience participation characterizes *Painting to Hammer a Nail* (Image 5). In this case, however, participants moved beyond the artist’s instructions, and the work evolved in an unforeseen direction. The piece consisted of a white wooden panel, a hammer attached to it, and a box of nails. Ono invited spectators to continue hammering nails into the surface until it was completely filled. During the exhibition, however, participants persisted even after the surface had become saturated, attaching scraps of paper, chewed gum, receipts, and other personal items around the panel. Although the museum itself did not intervene, a security guard removed the papers without consulting the artist and was subsequently dismissed from his position. Reflecting on the incident, Ono remarked: “I thought it was hilarious and loved it when the painting became covered with bits of paper. Then a woman decided this was not good and tried to restore the work to its original condition” (as cited in Holdar, 2018, p. 109).

Ono’s response to the incident reveals her understanding of artistic production as a collaborative process shared with the audience. Rather than insisting upon authorial control, she embraced the unexpected developments generated through participation. Here, a process unfolded that exceeded the artist’s original in-

tentions and evolved through chance. Discussing Ono’s large retrospective exhibition in Oxford in 1990, Angela Dimitrakaki demonstrates how the radical gestures of the 1960s became domesticated within the museum context of the 1990s. Referring specifically to *Painting to Hammer a Nail*, she critiques the institutional neutralization of participatory art:

Fluxus was clever, ambitious, confrontational and went as far as to ask you to contemplate the sky, tear up a painting and utilise a hammer (occasionally made of glass). It did not go far enough. Had it gone far enough, visitors to the show would probably have been allowed to pick a nail out of the bucket, follow the artist’s instructions and hammer the nail into the wall. Instead, they now read “please do not touch the artwork” next to the *Painting to Hammer a Nail* (1961/94) (Dimitrakaki, 1998, p. 100).

Image 5.

Yoko Ono, *Painting to Hammer a Nail*, 1961



The performative dimensions of Ono’s practice, as in her other works, are structured through instructions that generate actions. One of the most celebrated examples is *Cut Piece*, first performed in Kyoto in 1964. During the performance, Ono sits on the floor with a pair of scissors placed before her and invites audience members to cut pieces from her clothing. Participants approach one by one and remove fragments of fabric, with the size of each cut left entirely to their discretion. The performance continues until the artist decides to bring it to an end.

Unlike many of Ono’s earlier instruction-based works, *Cut Piece* places the artist’s own body at the center of the event. The performance has often been interpreted in relation to war, destruction, and fragmentation, reflecting Ono’s childhood experiences during the Second World War. At the same time, it has generated substantial feminist discussion. Critics have argued that Ono’s apparent embrace of a passive and vulnerable position risks reproducing conventional gender roles and objectifying modes of looking directed toward women’s bodies. However, many commentators emphasize that Ono’s unwavering and direct gaze toward the audience prevents her from becoming a passive object of observation. Rather than accepting the male gaze, she redirects it, creating an unsettling encounter that destabilizes established power relations. Consequently, her body becomes not merely an object of representation but a critical site through which questions of gender, power, and spectatorship are exposed and contested.

In 1966, Ono met musician John Lennon, and during the years

that followed she increasingly developed a practice in which the boundaries between art and activism became blurred, accompanied by a strong anti-war stance. Works such as *Acorn Event* (1968), *Bed-In for Peace* (1969), and the *War Is Over! If You Want It* campaign may be understood as collaborative performances realized by the pair.

Among these projects, *War Is Over! If You Want It* is particularly significant because it extends Ono's instruction-based practice into the political sphere. As part of the campaign, large billboards bearing the slogan "WAR IS OVER! IF YOU WANT IT" were displayed in cities across different countries. Although the work does not present spectators with an explicit instruction, the responsibility for ending war is implicitly transferred to them. The statement can therefore be read as an indirect instruction inviting audiences to take responsibility for the possibility of peace.

Similarly, the song *Imagine*, written in collaboration with John Lennon, also proceeds through a series of instructions. Widely regarded as one of the most influential songs in the history of popular music, *Imagine* invites listeners to envision a world founded upon peace and shared humanity:

Imagine no possessions. I wonder if you can. No need for greed or hunger. A brotherhood of man. Imagine all the people. Sharing all the world. You. You may say I'm a dreamer. But I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one (Lennon and Ono, 1971).

Yoko Ono's vision of peace and fraternity, together with her belief that this vision can be realized collectively through society, is reflected throughout both her life and artistic practice. As evidenced in her instruction-based works, she believes not only in cooperation and togetherness in everyday life but also in artistic production. Ono regards every individual as a small pebble person.

In her discussion of Yoko Ono's *Space Transformer*, Magdalena Holdar argues that Ono's instructions liberate spectators by transforming them from passive spectators into subjects who imagine, shape, and inhabit the artwork (2018). By transferring control of the artwork to the audience, Ono entrusts the completion of the work to the collective production of its participants. In this way, art ceases to remain under the exclusive control of the artist. At the same time, the instructions function in a manner analogous to a musical score. They provide a framework for action while leaving the realization of the work open to the interpreter's free will.

Instruction-based art highlights the route between *thing*, *command*, and *action*. It usually starts off with the material stuff which holds the instruction; a page in a book, a paper nailed to a gallery wall, or a card stuck in your wallet. The material's agency to do something to perform suggests that we have a thing rather than a passive object at hand. But the agency of the instruction, irrespective of its material form, is of course dependent on the command itself what the instruction asks us to do. And there is furthermore a massive difference between *receiving* an instruction and *acting* upon it (...) (Holdar, 2018, p. 108).

Although not writing specifically about Yoko Ono, art historian Claire Bishop similarly notes that participatory art practices are not always inherently emancipatory; in some cases, they risk reducing the spectator to a figure that merely serves the artist's pre-established scenario (Bishop, 2012, p. 38). She describes the evolution of these practices since the early twentieth century, together with their potential implications, as follows:

From the audience's perspective, we can chart this as a shift from an audience that demands a role (expressed as hostility towards avantgarde artists who keep control of the proscenium), to an audience that enjoys its subordination to strange experiences devised for them by an artist, to an audience that is encouraged to be a co-producer of the work (and who, occasionally, can even get paid for this involvement). This could be seen as an heroic narrative of the increased activation and agency of the audience, but we might also see it as a story of our ever-increasing voluntary subordination to the artists' will, and of the commodification of human bodies in a service economy (since voluntary participation is also unpaid labour) (Bishop, 2015, p. 277).

The Instruction-Based Artist's Book: Grapefruit

The grapefruit, which appears repeatedly in different contexts throughout Yoko Ono's art, is closely connected to the artist's personal history and occupies an important place within her artistic practice. In her autobiographical poem *Biography*, Ono writes that she gave birth to a grapefruit in the final years of her youth (Boriss-Krimsky & Beram, 2013). This statement demonstrates that the grapefruit exists not only as an image but also as a metaphor. The origins of Ono's special relationship with the grapefruit can be traced to one of her childhood visits to the United States, where she first encountered the fruit's taste. This flavor, situated somewhere between sweet and sour, gradually ceased to be merely a sensory memory and became a symbolic expression of her life between East and West and of her sense of belonging. According to curator Christophe Cherix, the grapefruit, as a hybrid citrus fruit, became a direct metaphor for hybridity in Ono's work (cited in Sheff, 2025, p. 37). The fruit represents Ono's fluid movement between Eastern and Western worlds and her attempt to reconcile these two cultures within her own identity. In this sense, the grapefruit may be read as a powerful image carrying the experience of in-betweenness and the feeling of displacement that played a formative role in the artist's identity. In Japan, she was excluded for being too American; in America, she was perceived as Japanese and thus remained an outsider. The grapefruit became a means through which she visualized this condition of belonging fully to neither culture. Beneath its exterior, the fruit contains a far richer, more vibrant, and more complex world than one might initially expect, thereby becoming a metaphor through which Ono understood herself. What initially appears to be a wrinkled yellow object reveals a juicy, fresh, and multilayered structure once its peel is removed.

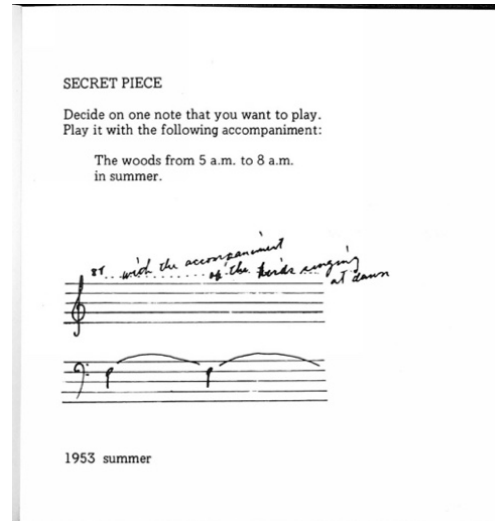
The grapefruit first appeared while Ono was still a university student in her story *A Grapefruit in the World of Park*, published in *Campus*, the magazine of Sarah Lawrence College. In this story, a group of young people in a park discuss a grapefruit. Because the trash bin is full, they debate what should be done with it. Through its grapefruit metaphor and the author's instructions to the characters, this text may be considered an early example of Ono's artistic approach.

Ono's next production associated with the grapefruit was the artist's book *Grapefruit* (Image 6), which can be regarded as a substantial body of work within her practice. The first edition of the book was released on July 4, 1964, the date of the United States Independence Day. This date was chosen because it commemorates the celebration of freedom by Americans (Boriss-Krimsky & Beram, 2013). For Ono, the book likewise represented a form of liberation and self-emancipation. Reflecting on the book, she stated: "*Grapefruit* was, without my realizing it, almost like a form of healing for me" (Boriss-Krimsky & Beram, 2013).

Image 6.Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit*, 1964

Grapefruit was first printed in Tokyo in 1964 in an edition of 500 copies. Due to Ono's financial circumstances, this first edition was designed and produced in a simple and unpretentious manner. The cover featured only a handwritten English title, while the interior contained 150 instructions written bilingually in Japanese and English. Ono financed the publication herself, sold copies independently, and even distributed many of them free of charge. In 1970, the book was republished with a foreword by John Lennon. Characteristically understated, the foreword consists of only two lines introducing Yoko Ono. In addition to the instructions included in the first edition, this new edition incorporated drawings and instructions produced during the intervening six years.

The book is divided into nine sections. The first section, entitled *Music*, contains instructions that transform sound from a purely auditory phenomenon into a state of mind. Works such as *Secret Piece*, in which sounds from nature are expressed through words rather than conventional musical notation, are included in this section. The instruction *Secret Piece* (Image 7), written in 1953, consists of a note written in English on a musical staff. Ono received piano and composition lessons during her childhood and continued to engage with music throughout much of her life. Written when she was only twenty years old, this instruction reveals the nature of her relationship with music and sound. *Secret Piece* was later published in *Grapefruit* (1964) together with a second version. In this version, Ono writes: "Decide on one note you want to play. Play it with the following accompaniment: The woods from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. in summer." The instruction emerged from her belief that conventional musical notation would be inadequate for describing sounds found in nature, such as birdsong; consequently, she replaced notes with words. Through this instruction, readers are invited to imagine the sounds of a forest in summer through language. The work is significant because it represents one of the earliest examples of the poetic instructions that Ono would later describe as instruction art. Here, the essential element is not physical performance but the idea and action that take place within the participant's mind.

Image 7.Yoko Ono, *Secret Piece*, 1964

The second section, *Painting*, opens with the following text:

Congratulations! You are one of 10,000 selected people to whom we have sent a piece of a painting by Yoko Ono. Each person has received a fragment of the painting. We plan to organize a gathering in the future in order to assemble all the pieces and appreciate the work. The painting remains intact in its original form. However, since we still have several pieces remaining, you may suggest names of people to whom we should send them. It is important that you indicate your friend's social status in your letter, as the size of the portion will be determined accordingly. SERIAL NO. # 9,331 (Ono, 2000, p. 67).

This introduction exemplifies how Yoko Ono was able to transform even a conventional artistic practice such as painting through her own approach. As in many of her works, a world is constructed collaboratively with the spectator, within which artist and participant occupy equal positions. The section continues with numerous instruction-based texts of this kind. Included are works that invite participants to step on a canvas, pierce it, or construct the painting solely within their minds.

The *Event* section consists of poetic and performative actions intended to be carried out in specific locations or situations. Among them are *Lighting Piece*, which asks participants to watch a match until it extinguishes itself, and *Map Piece*, presented in two different versions. Whereas the first version of *Map Piece* from 1962 simply instructs participants to draw a map and then become lost, the 1964 version provides more detailed directions:

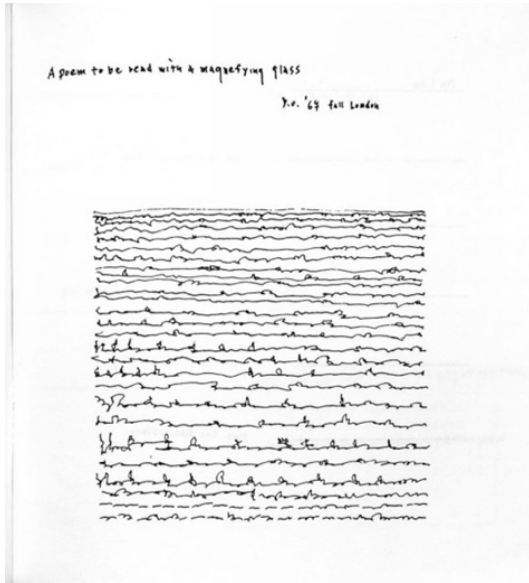
Draw an imaginary map. Mark a target destination on the map. Take a walk on a real street according to your map. If there is no street where one should be according to the map, move obstacles aside and create one. When you arrive at the destination, ask the name of the city and give flowers to the first person you meet. The map must be followed exactly; otherwise, the event must be cancelled entirely. Ask your friends to draw maps. Give maps to your friends (Ono, 2000, p. 126).

The *Poetry* section focuses on unconventional uses of language (Image 8). For instance, readers are provided with a postcard template intended to be sent to Yoko Ono. Within this template, the reader is encouraged to play with words through a variety of

sentence structures. The section also includes questionnaires, questions, poems, event scores, and a sales list containing Ono's works and ephemera. This piece may be interpreted as one of Ono's most explicit critiques of the art market. Functioning as a direct critique of the value assigned to artworks, the list itself is simultaneously transformed into an object available for purchase.

Image 8.

Yoko Ono, *Poetry*, 1964



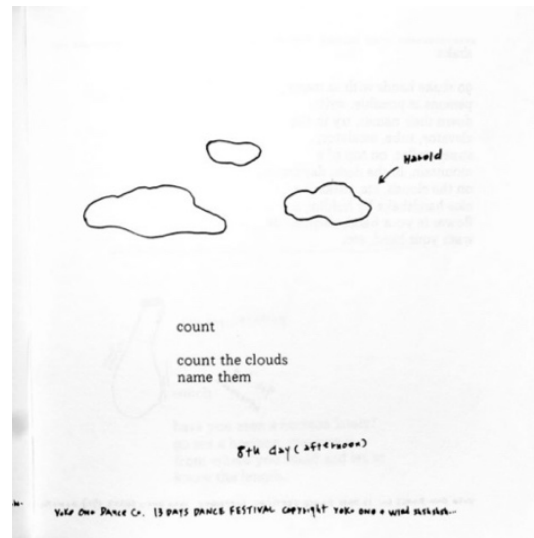
The sixth section, *Object*, is structured around the burning, collecting, and ontological reconsideration of objects. It includes instructions such as *Revalue Piece*, which proposes that works by artists such as Henry Moore or Pablo Picasso be used as household objects.

The seventh section, *Film*, consists of conceptual film scripts, imaginary film proposals, and a questionnaire designed for film viewers to be sent to Yoko Ono. At the beginning of this section, Ono writes: "A dream you dream alone may only be a dream. A dream you dream together is reality" (Ono, 2000, p. 209). This statement may be read as one of the most concise summaries of her artistic practice. Her understanding of the relationship between art and life, as well as her opposition to conceptions of art detached from lived experience, become particularly evident in this sentence.

The *Dance* section presents a series of works in which participants communicate through telepathy and reconceive fundamental signs of life, such as breathing, as forms of dance. In this section, Ono designs an imaginary thirteen-day dance festival and writes a separate instruction for each day. For example, *Count* (Image 9), the instruction assigned to the eighth day, consists of cloud drawings accompanied by a brief text. In *Count*, readers are instructed to count the clouds and give each one a name. Once again, a conjunction of physical and mental action is established. In the accompanying drawing, it can be seen that the artist herself has named one of the clouds "Harold." Ono thus shares a common thought and action with her reader, creating another moment of collective participation.

Image 9.

Yoko Ono, *Count*, 1964



Architecture Pieces is dedicated to a ghost architect and contains designs for spaces that are physically impossible to construct. The ninth and final section, entitled *On Films*, consists of a text in which the artist shares her thoughts, essays, and anecdotes concerning her own film works.

Ono's instructions simultaneously open up a discussion on the limitations of language itself. Just as she regarded musical notation as insufficient in certain contexts, she was equally interested in the contradictions inherent in language as a means of communication. For example, in *Question Piece*, first performed in 1962, two audience members came onto the stage and asked each other questions in French. In this performance, each participant responded to the other's question not with an answer but with another question. The work was subsequently repeated in many different languages, sometimes as a dialogue and at other times as a monologue.

Question Piece became one of the most significant examples through which Yoko Ono's relationship with Zen Buddhism became apparent. During her childhood in Japan, Ono encountered Zen teachings through domestic workers in her family home and maintained her connection to these ideas after moving to the United States. Zen Buddhism emerged as an important paradigm not only for Ono but also for many Fluxus artists. John Cage, who had studied under the Japanese philosopher of religion Daisetsu T. Suzuki one of the key figures responsible for introducing Zen philosophy to the Western world played a crucial role in familiarizing many Fluxus artists with these ideas. Zen philosophy's emphasis on the present moment, its elevation of the everyday and the ordinary, and its attention to lived experience formed an important foundation for Fluxus's relationship to art. Like Zen philosophy itself, Ono's *Question Piece* is concerned with inhabiting the present moment and with the connections established through lived experience. Free from the pursuit of definitive answers and intellectual certainties, what matters here is dialogue itself and life as it is lived.

Another work in which the traces of Zen Buddhism can be discerned, and which, like many of Ono's works, emphasizes unity and togetherness, is *Mask Piece I* and *Mask Piece II*. In *Mask Piece I*, Ono writes: "Make a mask larger than your face. Polish the mask

every day. In the morning, wash the mask instead of your face. When somebody wants to kiss you, let that person kiss your mask (Ono, 2000)."

Here, once again, attention is directed toward the relationships and forms of dialogue individuals establish with others, as well as the limitations inherent within them. The work raises questions concerning the self that we present to the outside world, the self perceived by others, and the self that we actually are. *Mask Piece* / functions as an instruction that critiques the tension between the fictional character performed by the individual in the social sphere and the inner self, while also exposing the artificial dualisms produced through this process. Through instructions such as polishing the mask daily, washing it instead of one's real face, and allowing others to kiss the mask rather than the person behind it, Ono problematizes the immense effort invested in maintaining one's social image and the manner in which this process renders the authentic self invisible. In doing so, she destabilizes and opens for discussion the dualisms rejected by Zen Buddhism, such as subject and object, or self and other, that have long structured Western thought.

This approach is also closely related to Ono's upbringing within both Eastern and Western cultural contexts and to her experience of spending her childhood and youth between two different cultures and geographical locations. This condition of dual identity likewise manifests itself in *Drinking Piece for Orchestra* (1963): "Imagine a goldfish swimming in the sky. Let it swim from West to East. Drink one liter of water. Imagine a goldfish swimming in the sky. Let it swim from East to West (Ono, 2000)."

Here, the reader is invited simultaneously to imagine an impossible situation and to perform a physical action. This physical action directs the participant toward bodily sensation and toward the Zen aesthetic principle of the *here and now*. The goldfish imagined in the sky encounters the human body through the act of drinking water; in other words, it encounters water itself. The emphasis on the orchestra in the title may also be understood in relation to Ono's conception of the human body as an instrument.

The metaphor of the sky, which appears in *Drinking Piece for Orchestra*, becomes, like the grapefruit metaphor, one of the most significant recurring motifs in Ono's artistic production. The artist recounts that during the bombing of Tokyo in the Second World War, while hiding from air raids, she saw a patch of blue sky through a crack in the roof of the building where she had taken shelter. She recalls that this image gave her hope and reassurance that everything would eventually be all right (Boriss-Krimsky & Beram, 2013, p. 9). This experience did not remain merely a childhood memory; rather, it became a defining image within her intellectual and aesthetic universe. Consequently, the sky was repeatedly rearticulated throughout Ono's artistic practice as a metaphor for hope, freedom, and mental boundlessness that persists even among destruction, ultimately becoming one of the central motifs shaping the conceptual foundation of many of her works.

Conclusion

Fluxus artists' publications are experimental forms that transformed conventional understandings of publishing both formally and conceptually. Rather than functioning merely as objects designed to convey information or to be read, they constitute interactive artistic practices that can be touched, rearranged, and actively engaged with. The reader is no longer positioned as a passive recipient but as an active subject involved in the production

of the work itself. Artists frequently establish this participation through play, chance, or instructions. Instruction-based works, in particular, transform the artistic experience into an individual and variable process by directing spectators to perform specific actions. This approach is directly related to Fluxus's broader objective of dissolving the boundaries between art and life.

In this context, *Grapefruit*, the artist's book by artist, activist, and musician Yoko Ono, one of the founding figures of Fluxus, may also be understood through such a framework. Instruction-based works, which constitute one of the central motifs underlying Ono's artistic practice since the 1950s, have been exhibited and performed across a variety of media. Initially presented on canvases in her earliest exhibitions, these instructions later took the form of performance works in pieces such as *Cut Piece*. Independently published and distributed by Ono in 1964, *Grapefruit* functions as an anthology that brings together these instructions.

The independent publication and distribution of *Grapefruit* directly aligns with George Maciunas's objective of dismantling the fine arts establishment and removing art from the elitist monopoly of galleries. By relocating performance beyond the confines of exhibition spaces, Fluxus publishing gave rise to a low-cost, accessible form of "do-it-yourself" art that could be realized by audiences within their own private environments. Unlike conventional texts, in which readers passively follow the written content, the production presented here can only be completed through the reader's participation. Through the medium of text, Ono provides instructions that encourage readers to take action. These actions are not limited to physical activities but may also take place on a mental level. At times, she compels readers to imagine impossible or unreal stories; at others, she invites them to engage in physical actions through the mediation of an object.

In conclusion, Yoko Ono's artist's book *Grapefruit* occupies a distinctive and pioneering position as one of the earliest and foundational examples of the Fluxus movement, shaped by the historical and geographical context in which it emerged. Ono was influenced not only by the artistic milieu that surrounded her and by the spirit of her time, but also by the experiences of her personal life, all of which contributed significantly to the formation of her artistic practice. *Grapefruit* may ultimately be understood as an expression of her desire to transform the world, and to do so collectively, together with society as a whole.

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Image References

Image 1.

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/126322>

Image 2.

<https://artistsbooksandmultiples.blogspot.com/2022/05/ben-patterson-instruction-no-2-please.html>

Image 3.

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/ay-o/finger-box-1965>

Image 4.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fluxus_1#/media/File:Fluxus1.jpg

Image 5.

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/painting-to-hammer-a-nail-yoko-ono/pAEqDOysHPoj6Q?hl=fr>

Image 6.

https://www.moma.org/wp/inside_out/wpcontent/uploads/2014/04/Ono_Grapefruit.jpg

Image 7.

Ono, Y. (2000). *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings by Yoko Ono*. Simon & Schuster

Image 8.

Ono, Y. (2000). *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings by Yoko Ono*. Simon & Schuster

Image 9.

Ono, Y. (2000). *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings by Yoko Ono*. Simon & Schuster

Yapılandırılmış Özet

Fluxus hareketi, 1960'lı yılların başında sanat piyasasına ve sanatın gündelik hayattan koparak bu piyasa içindeki hiyerarşilerle ilişkilenebilmesine eleştiri getiren yeni ve özgün bir hareket olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Sanat nesnesinin bir metaya dönüştüğü dönemin koşulları içinde, sanat eserinin erişilebilirliği ve değeri üzerine tartışmalar geliştirmişlerdir. Bu anlamda birçok farklı pratiği sahiplenmiş, özellikle sanatçı yayınları olarak genellenebilecek birçok çoğaltılabilir eser gerçekleştirmişlerdir. Fluxkit, fluxbox, fluxbook olarak çeşitlendirilebilecek olan bu üretimler, klasik yayın anlayışını aşarak kartlar, nesneler ve etkileşimli metinlerden oluşmakta, böylece sanat yapıtının tekil ve piyasa değeri yüksek bir nesne olarak tanımlanmasına karşı bir üretim modeli geliştirmektedir. Bu yayınlarda performanslar, oyunlar, talimatlar gibi izleyici katılımını içeren deneysel bir alan kurgulanmıştır.

Bu makalede, Fluxus'un kurucu figürlerinden biri olan kavramsal sanatçı, aktivist ve müzisyen Yoko Ono'nun 1964 yılında bağımsız olarak yayımladığı Grapefruit adlı sanatçı yayını, Fluxus'un yukarıda bahsedilen çeşitli üretimler aracılığıyla hedeflediği kriterlerle olan ilişkisi bağlamında betimsel ve yorumlayıcı bir yöntemle, örnek vaka olarak analiz edilmiştir. Burada amaçlanan, Grapefruit sanatçı yayını hem içinde bulunduğu dönem hem de Fluxus hareketiyle ilişkilendirmek ve bu hareket içindeki özgün yerini ortaya koymaktır. Bu çerçevede öncelikle yayının biçimsel özellikleri tanımlanmış, ardından bu biçimsel kararlar, hem Fluxus'un bahsettiği gündelik olanla ilişki, erişilebilirlik gibi temalar üzerinden hem de sanatçının kişisel hayatı üzerinden yorumlanmıştır. Yazıda Grapefruit yayınının seçilmesi, bu yayının Fluxus'un en erken örneklerinden biri olması ve biçim ve içerik ilişkisi üzerinden incelenmek üzere temsil gücü yüksek bir vaka niteliği taşımasından kaynaklanmaktadır.

İkinci Dünya Savaşı döneminde Japonya'da doğan Yoko Ono, çocukluğu boyunca Amerika'ya gidip gelmiş, iki farklı coğrafyada, her iki coğrafyada da bir yabancı gibi büyümüş bir sanatçıdır. Onun dünya barışına dair mücadelesi, komünite oluşturma ve birlikte üretme gayesi, çocukluğuyla da ilişkilenebilecek herkesin eşit ve paydaş olduğu bir dünya hayalinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Sanatçının kişisel hayatındaki izler, onun Grapefruit yayınında olduğu gibi, tüm üretimlerinde rastlanabilecek detaylarda kendini göstermektedir.

Grapefruit, gelenekselleşmiş sanatçı yayınlarından hem biçimsel olarak hem de izleyiciyle kurduğu ilişki bakımından birçok farklı noktada ayrılan, öncü ve özgün bir yayın olarak tanımlanabilir. 1964 yılında, sanatçının bağımsız olarak bastırdığı ve hiçbir yayıncı ile anlaşmadan, kendi imkanlarıyla dağıttığı bu yayın hem üretim süreci, hem de sonrasındaki dağıtım süreci ile, Fluxus'un amaçladığı bağımsızlık ve erişilebilirlik ilkeleriyle uyumaktadır.

Yoko Ono'nun talimata dayalı sanat pratiğinin ilk örnekleri, hem kendi stüdyosunda gerçekleştirdiği etkinlikler ve performanslarda, hem de ilk sergisinde yer alan tuvalerde kendini göstermektedir. Geleneksel tuval resminden farklılaşarak, izleyicilerin tuvale basmasını ya da tuvali yakmasını talep eden üretimleri, onun hayatı boyunca devam ettireceği sanat anlayışının ilk örnekleridir.

Bu yaklaşımın ilk ve önemli örneklerinden biri olan Grapefruit, dokuz kategoriden oluşan ve her bölüm içinde çeşitli metinler ve çizimler bulunan kitap formunda bir yayındır. Kitabın içindeki çizimler ve metinlerde okuyucuya yönelik talimatlar bulunmaktadır. Bunlar kimi zaman izleyiciyi fiziksel bir eyleme çağırırken, kimi zaman yalnızca gökyüzünü hayal etmek gibi düşünsel eylemlere davet eder. Grapefruit yayını, ismini Ono'nun kendini ilişkilendirdiği ve melez bir meyve olarak tanımladığı greylift meyvesinden almaktadır. Greylift melez bir meyvedir ve içiyle dışı hem form hem de tat olarak farklılaşmaktadır. Ono da kendisini greylift gibi dışarıdan farklı görünen, ancak içeride farklı bir dünya taşıyan bir meyve olarak görmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu yayının aynı zamanda otobiyografik bir özellik taşıdığı da söylenebilir.

Yoko Ono, Grapefruit içindeki talimatlar aracılığıyla okuyucuyu sanat eserinin etkin katılımına açmaktadır. Kitap tek başında, izleyiciyle buluşmazsa bir şey ifade etmez. Ancak okuyucu bu talimatları okuyup, onları gerçekleştirdiğinde sanat eseri tamamlanmaktadır. Tamamlanmış ve sabit bir sanat nesnesinden ziyade, izleyiciyle ortaklaşa üretilen düşünsel ve deneyime dayalı bir süreç kurgulanmıştır. Sanat üretimi, sonuç odaklı, sanat piyasasına ait bir meta olarak değil, sürece dayalı, izleyici katılımıyla tamamlanan ortak bir pratik haline gelmektedir. Onu geleneksel yayınlardan farklılaştıran bu özelliği, okuru eyleme geçmeye, hayal etmeye ve anlam üretimine katılmaya davet eden performatif bir yapı oluşturmaktadır. Aynı zamanda her izleyicinin her talimatı farklı bir şekilde gerçekleştiriyor olması da burada tek bir sonuçtan ziyade, birçok farklı sonuca olanak sağlayan, her izleyici deneyimi ile farklı bir üretim ortaya koyan alternatif bir üretim pratiği de sağlanmış olur.

Bu talimatlar, izleyiciler için, sadece sergi salonları ya da müzelerde değil, kendi başlarına ve istedikleri yerde yapabilecekleri, sergi mekânlarına bağımlı olmayan bir karşılaşma anı yaratmaktadır. Böylelikle, yine Fluxus'un sanat eserinin galerilere ve müzelere bağımlı yapısına karşı bir alternatif üretilmiştir. Artık her yer, gündelik hayatın içinden her mekân sanat eseriyle karşılaşmaya ve onu gerçekleştirmeye açık bir alana dönüşebilmektedir.

Tüm bu özellikleriyle Grapefruit, Fluxus'un bağımsızlık ve erişilebilirlik bağlamında ortaya koyduğu yaklaşımların öncü bir örneği olarak tanımlanabilir. Fluxus'un yayıncılık anlayışı, sanat eserinin dolaşımı ve izleyici katılımı ekseninde geliştirdiği alternatif modellerin ilk örneklerinden biridir.