

Now It Can Be— Why Did It Fail Before?

Edited by [Mark Melnicove](#)
and Fredrik Averin

The Idea of the Book <info@theideaofthebook.com>



In *Now it Can Be—Why Did it Fail Before*, Bern Porter, like a modern-day Virgil, guides readers through the pitfalls and healing modalities of life and death. He shines a light on self-help, both as an industry and a personal pursuit, through his wit-filled self-help “founds” appropriated from books, magazines, newspapers, brochures, manuals, advertisements, and junk mail.

The result is a profound and curative dialogue manifesting itself in the form of questions, statements, and prompts for the heart, mind, and soul that walk the perilous line between sincerity and satire.

This self-help/mindfulness aspect of Porter’s work has not been commented upon before, nor been the stated purpose of his previous books.

An ongoing body of work shaped over five decades beginning in the 1960s, Porter’s founds have stood the test of time and are as poignant and relevant today as ever. With pinpoint precision, he skillfully recontextualizes the humanity often lacking in the original source material.



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Hung up? Fed up? Downtrodden? Uptight? Overworked? Underpaid? Too busy to say? Too busy to think without a phone in your hand? Do you ever wonder if you are your best self? Are you metaphorically and/or literally gambling your life away? Have you ever wished for a different kind of self-help book to embark you on a new kind of journey toward discovery, understanding, and recovery?

“There is no question that no one was doing quite what Porter was doing when he was doing it, and that lots of people are doing versions of it now.”

Publishers Weekly (*starred review of Porter's *Found Poems*, 2011, Nightboat Books)

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The trade and limited editions are issued with...

- a book bag label;
- pictorial dust jacket;
- facsimile of Bern Porter's business card from the late 1960s;
- rubber-stamped bookmark;
- numbered, education physics card;
- two rubber-stamped, circular seals;
- and white pencil, foil stamped with an altered Bern Porter found.

Additionally the limited edition is issued with:

- a canvas bag; perforated sheet of artist's stamps;
- two versions of a 1947 Harry Bowden photograph of the newly married, soon-to-be-divorced Bern Porter inspecting a found object while seated in his Sausalito, CA gallery (Schillerhaus);
- and rubber-stamped, blank check signed and endorsed by Bern Porter.

Now It Can Be—Why Did It Fail Before? by Bern Porter
[Bern Porter \(1911-2004\)](#)



photo: Mark Melnicove

“People growing like flowers in the field as nature intended find finding and seeing finds an exciting thing.”

—Bern Porter

Bernard “Bern” “Bug” Harden Porter (1911–2004) was a scientist, physicist, inventor, writer, poet, concrete and visual poet, artist, book artist, mail artist, performer, gallerist, sculptor, publisher, editor, teacher, lecturer, city planner, cartoonist, debater, globe wanderer, and quintessential, modern-day renaissance persona like no other.



Born in Maine's northeast corner on his family's potato farm, [Bern Porter](#) parlayed an early passion for art and science into a career of paradoxical accomplishments: essayist and thinker who appropriated texts; Manhattan Project scientist and peace activist; San Francisco Renaissance avant-garde publisher and one-time Republican Party

candidate for Governor of Maine; Saturn moon rocket engineer and subject of a massive U.S. Government security file.

[Porter authored over 100 books during his life, including these six from which the founds in *Now It Can Be—Why Did It Fail Before?* were selected:](#)

- The Wastemaker* (1972)
- Found Poems* (1972)
- The Manhattan Phone Book* (1975)
- The Book of Do's* (1982)
- Here Comes Everybody's Don't Book* (1984)
- Sweet End* (1989)

James Schevill wrote two biographies of Porter: *The Roaring Market and the Silent Tomb* (Abbey Press, 1957) and *Where to Go, What to Do, When You Are Bern Porter: A Personal Biography* (Tilbury House, 1992).

The entire issue of the *Colby Library Quarterly* (June 1970, Series IX, No. 2) is devoted to essays and bibliographic information about Porter.

Now It Can Be—Why Did It Fail Before? by Bern Porter Editors

Mark Melnicove and Fredrik Averin

From 1980-1993, [Mark Melnicove](#) was Bern Porter's publisher (The Dog Ear Press) and performance poetry partner (The Eternal Poetry Festival).



As Porter's literary executor, he has overseen and participated in a wide array of posthumous-Porter books, exhibits, and symposia, such as MOMA's exhibition "Lost and Found" (2010); Nightboat Books' republication of Porter's *Found Poems* (2011); the Bern Porter Occasional Symposium Series: THE BOMB, THE NATIONAL SECURITY STATE, AND THE ADVANCED THINKING OF BERN PORTER (2011); and Colby College Art Museum's exhibition "Listen to This Page" (2015).

Melnicove lectures on, writes about, and collaborates in publishing Bern Porter's work. His film "about, with, and without Bern Porter," *Joy Glows*

Where Confusion Was, premiered at the opening of Porter's 2010 MOMA exhibition ("Lost and Found").

Like Porter, Melnicove reinvigorates found materials in his writing and art. His recent books include *Sometimes Times* (with Terry Winters, Dome Editions, 2023; *Two Palms*, 2017), *Africa Is Not a Country* (with Margy Burns Knight, Lerner Publishing Group, 2022 and 2001, winner of the Children's Africana Book Award), and *Ghosts* (with Abby Shahn, Cedar Grove House, 2019).

For over 40 years he has taught creative writing in schools as a classroom teacher and writer-in-residence. His essay, "The Mysterious Bird of Fire: Writing Collaboratively with Kids" appears in a new edition of *Teachers and Writers Magazine*.

He received an MFA in writing and literature from Bennington College in 2000. His papers are collected at Bowdoin College's George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives. The Kennebec River Valley, in Dresden, Maine, is his home.



Born in Stockholm, Sweden, **Fredrik Averin** received his MFA in 1998 from Konstfack—The University College of Arts, Crafts, and Design in Stockholm. He is a design director, art director, book designer, bookshop proprietor, and publisher. In questioning the format and purpose of the book, as well as in his own art and writing, Averin explores language, human narratives, and self-awareness through the printed and unprinted page. Collections of his work can be found at MACBA: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, University of Oregon, University of Washington, University of New York at

Buffalo, Columbia University, Stanford University, and SFMOMA.

Since 2016, Fredrik has been the founder and proprietor of The Idea of the Book—an online bookshop, resource, and publisher dedicated to the history and tradition of books and material in the overlapping fields of art, design, and concrete poetry.

As a book designer and publisher, Fredrik collaborates with artists, authors, photographers, and publishing houses to create unique books and reading experiences rooted in the history and tradition of artists' books and the reinvention of the codex as a means of human connection.

He currently lives and works in Portland, Oregon.

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