

IN WHAT FOLLOWS, dear reader, you will notice there are times when I use the first-person plural, *we* or *us*. Might I ask for your patience? It is not always obvious whom I mean, and it's for this reason: I don't know.

This book seeks to enact as much as describe. When I use *we*, therefore, I imagine it more as a liturgical than a declarative or prescriptive utterance. It's liturgical in this sense: in church, there were times when the priest's *we* would include me ("Give us this day our daily bread") and times when it would not ("We believe in One God, the Father, the Almighty"). No one quite gave me permission to identify or opt out, but the space was nonetheless available between the altar and me. Therefore, just as I ask for some patience, I also intend this note as an invitation.

I write in anticipation that some who have come to these pages will feel acknowledged. Svetlana Boym writes that "the nostalgic is looking for a spiritual addressee. Encountering silence, [s]he looks for memorable signs, desperately misreading them."¹ I wonder if it's possible to hold that misreadings can take us both into and out of nostalgia, if encountering memorable signs in what reveal themselves, over time, as misreadings can also release us, and if instead of looking for a spiritual addressee, I might be able to sustain—as a practice and a habit and a ritual—the conditional. If I were to have already found one, or many. If not, the fair truth is that that's how many books disappear, even those which studiously, humbly avoid either the first-person plural or an invitation. And so I take this other risk. Alone when I write *we*, but maybe soon with some company.