

WE ARE A SYSTEM OF GHOSTS

is what a man says in a documentary about his city.  
At least, that's what I remember he says. When I rewind  
to find his words, I'm not surprised that I can't. Once,  
before I lived there, my mother brought me to Chicago  
and we laughed through downtown like girls.  
We drank wine and ate pasta. A few years later,  
we tried to find it again, this best-ever place,  
but we'd forgotten the sidewalk to turn down, or the way  
the restaurant's awning threw its door frame in shadow.  
My mother protested: *but these streets are a grid.*  
She studied the map pressed flat to her knees. I think of all the maps  
of countries and borders that no longer exist. In France,  
I lived near the site of the Ligne Maginot, that line of tankers  
and casements in World War II designed to keep Germany out—  
the countryside dotted with armored cloches of alloyed steel.  
The machine-gun turrets retracting into the ground. This vanishing  
reminds me of informal cities, the claimed settlements  
that appear along abandoned rail tracks, the spaces people fill  
and empty. The woman in the apartment below me has birds,  
and they squawk in greeting when they see her, as if to say:  
*oh there you are.* I listen as her front door slams each day. Maybe  
she watches as I wait for the bus, my eyes shut tight to the wind.