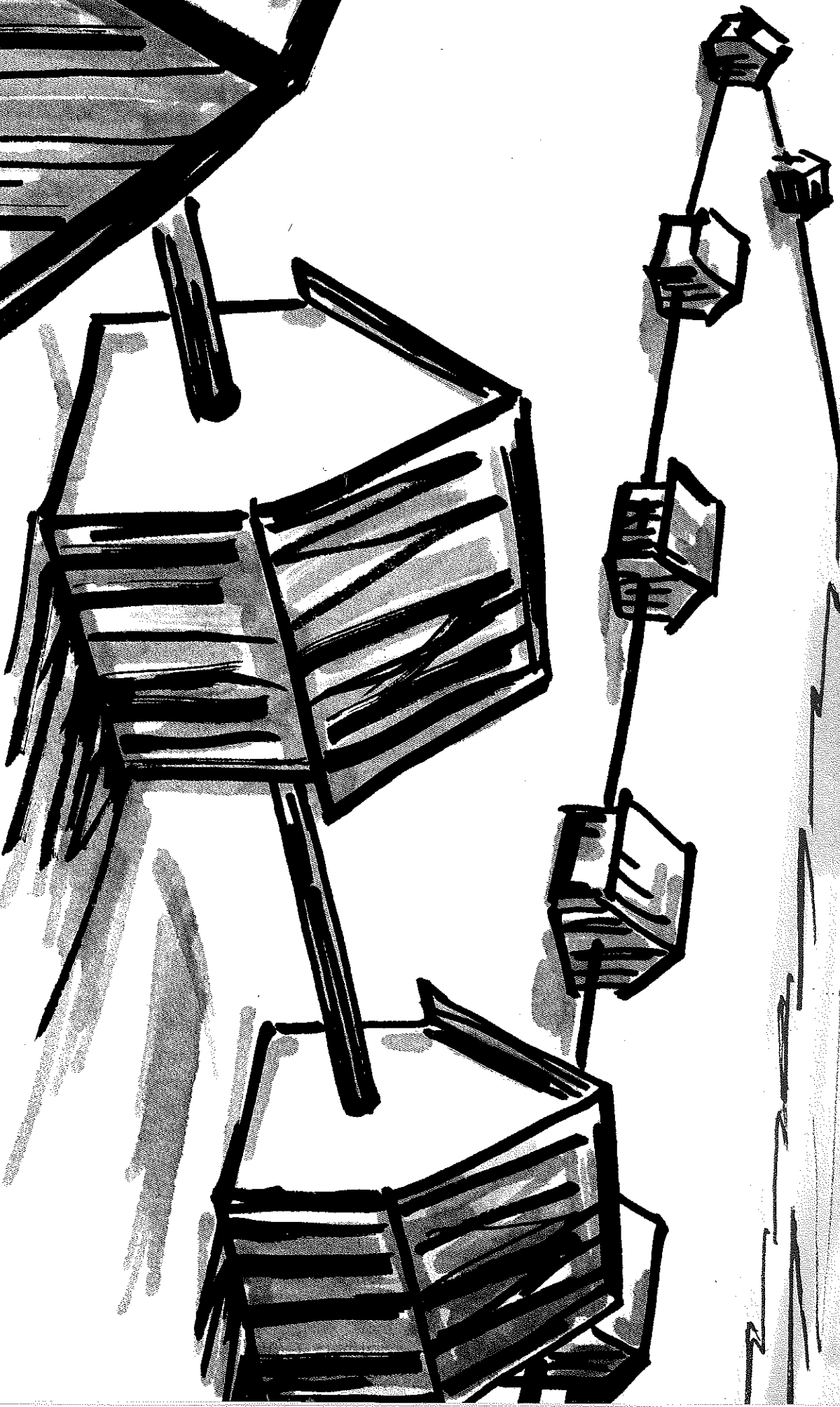


The Justice Pipeline: A Parable



The Justice Pipeline: A Parable

by Howard Zehr

The criminal justice system is like a large lake with a pipe coming out of it. The pipe goes in and out of a series of small windowless huts. Inside of each hut is a valve. The pipe terminates in a bucket.

Inside each hut is a person representing a criminal justice actor – police, prosecutor, judge, sheriff, etc. – who operates the valve, but there is no agreement on why each one is turning the valve. Some think they are filling the bucket.

Some are trying to regulate the lake. Some like the feeling of power or the sound of the water. Some just like to turn valves.

Nor is there any way for any of them to know what the other people are doing, or what the outcome is, until the bucket runs over and feet get wet. When a flood occurs, each can blame the other, but they are not able to agree and cooperate enough to prevent disaster.

Finding a bigger bucket will not help. Nothing is likely to change until windows are put in the huts. valve-turners are made responsible for their actions, actors agree on what they are trying to do, and other outlets besides the bucket are added to the pipeline.

