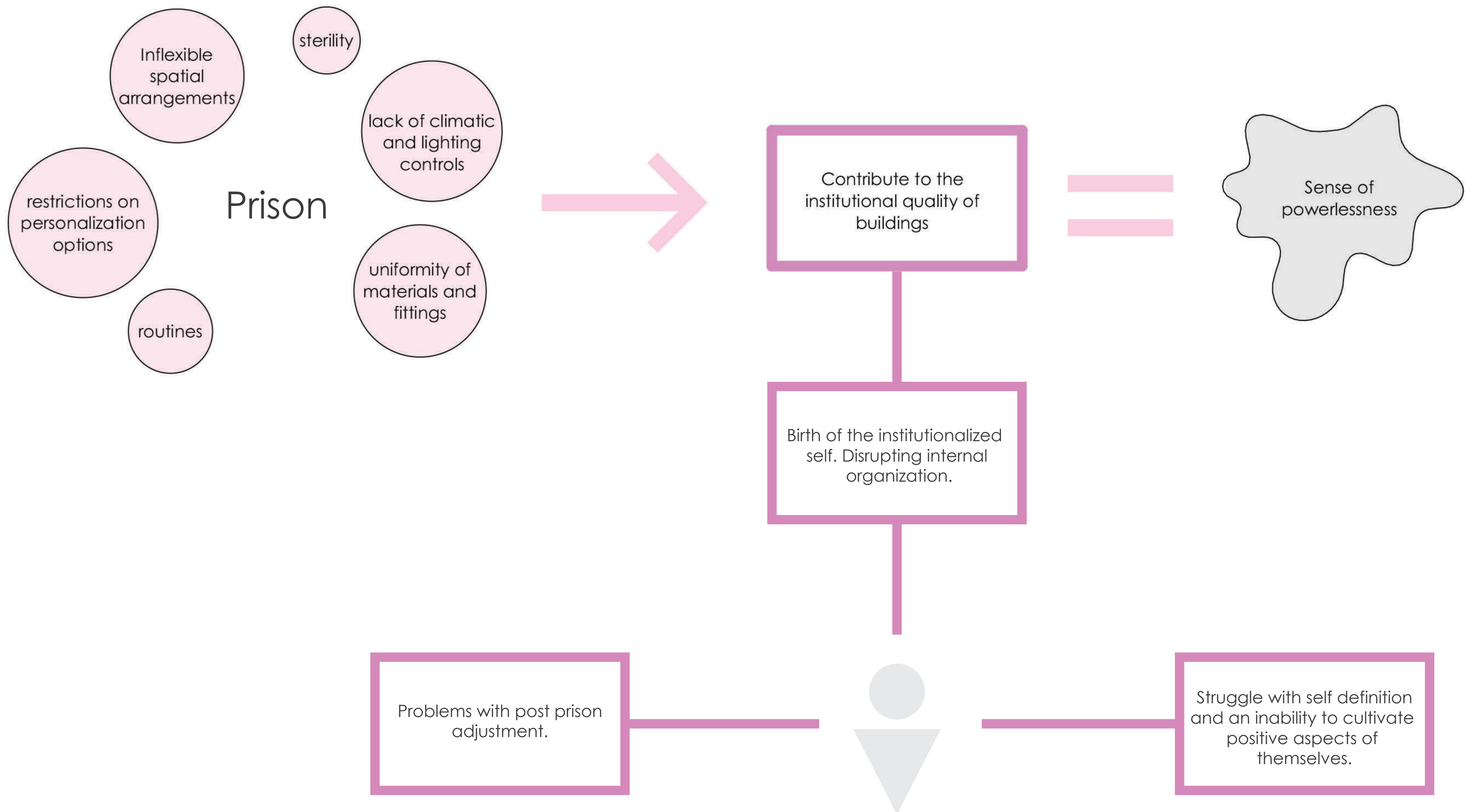


# RETHINKING THE PRISON CELL

## Designing Aspects of Self-Identity for Incarcerated Women Through Spatial Design

Modelled to exert discipline, power and control, the criminal justice system has historically been regarded as a system that is gender insensitive, in terms of its structures, protocols and routines. Therefore, not accommodating the needs of female inmates both physically and emotionally.

The sense of powerlessness also related to the struggle and need for self-definition in penal institutions is an overlooked yet important aspect in how inmates associate with themselves, their environment and the people around them.



The thesis addresses the gap that lies between the admission of a female inmate into a prison institution and the importance of the prison cell to support their transformative capacities as human beings up until their release.

### Research Questions:

1. How can spatial design be used to help female inmates maintain aspects of themselves, supported by the spaces they inhabit?
2. How can we transfer the personal qualities we have with our intimate objects to the spaces without personalized objects?  
In this case, the prison cells?



Ensuring that those who serve time in prison can in the long run be able to positively and fully adjust back to their families, friends and society at large.

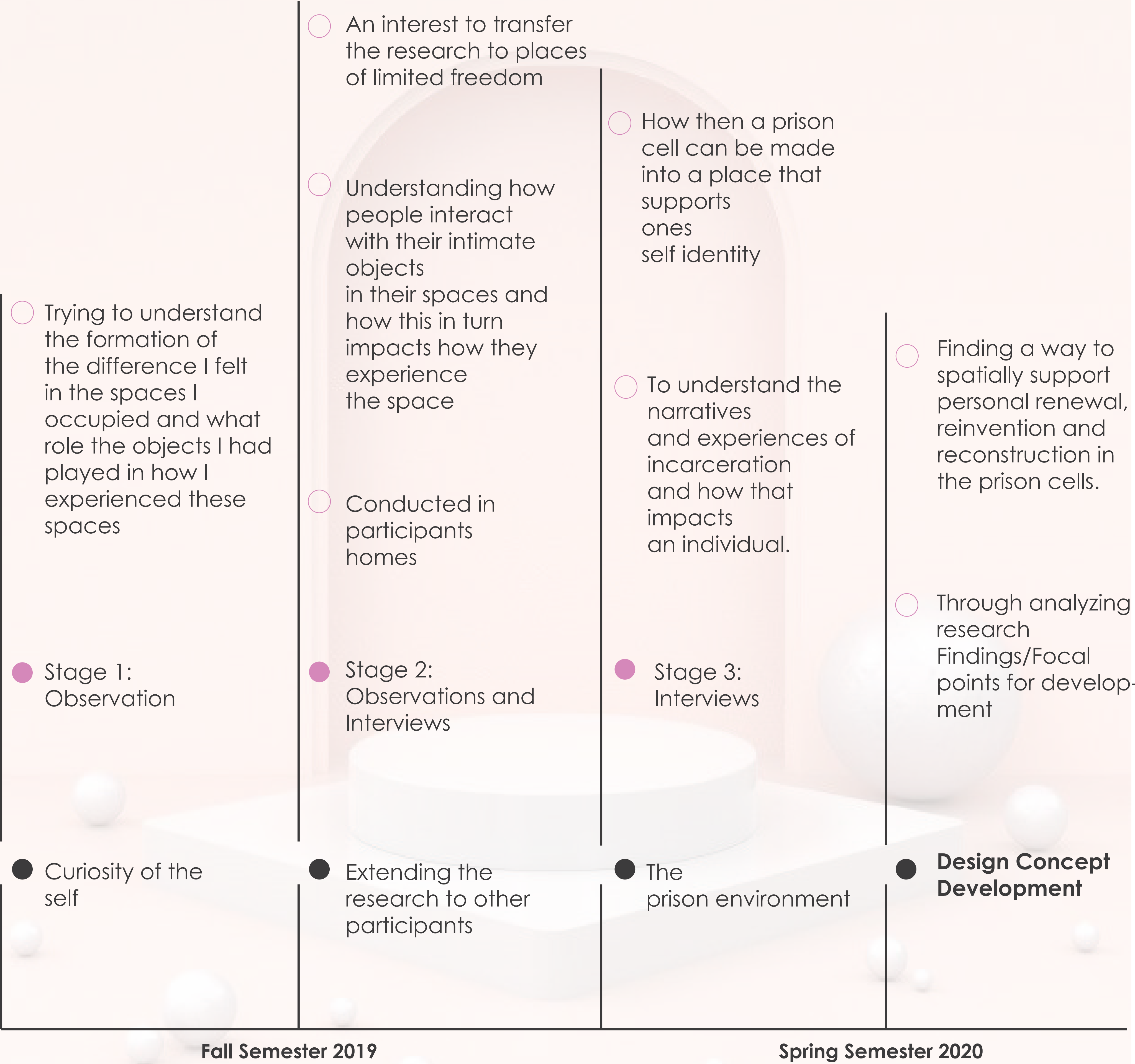


# RESEARCH

The research was done in stages, beginning with myself as the research subject in regards to the attachment I had with the objects in the spaces I occupied and how a presence of personal objects or a lack thereof made me experience different spaces differently. The next stage was concerned with how other people interact with objects in their spaces and how this impacted their experience with that space. The other was concerned with understanding living conditions and routines of inmates through people who have previously worked with the prison environment and also an interview with a former inmate.

Qualitative research methods: Observations  
Interviews: Face to face and use of questionnaires

Data analysis: Documentation through taking of pictures and audio recording  
Transcribing the interviews then identifying the common themes through an open coding thematic analysis



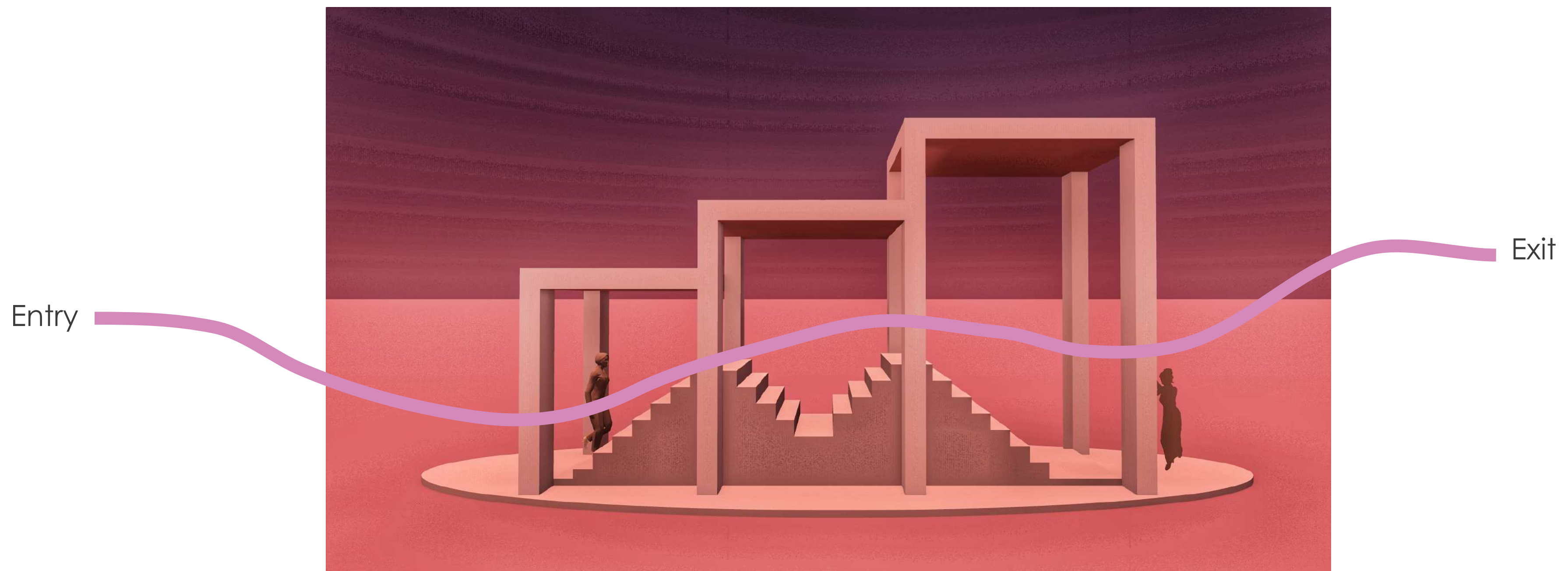


# DESIGN CONCEPT

Supporting the transformative capacities of the self through developing 3 transmission phases in the cell designs namely;

Phase 1: **Reflection**, Phase 2: **Transformation**, Phase 3: **Integration**

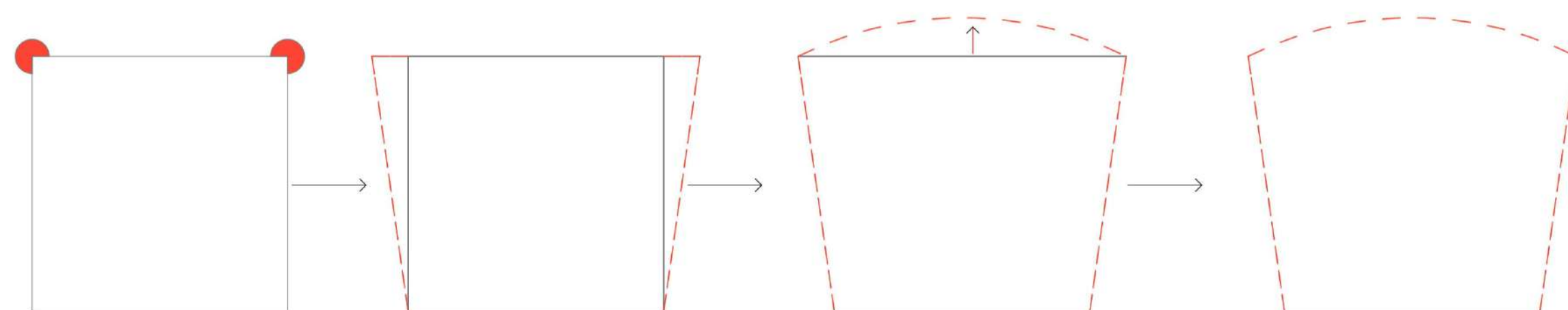
Encouraging role transitions to support changes in the self in habitable spaces for female inmates.



Breaking from the angularity prominent with traditional prison cells



Opening up the cube shaped prison cell to introduce the curve.  
Linking the soft features with positive associations with a space

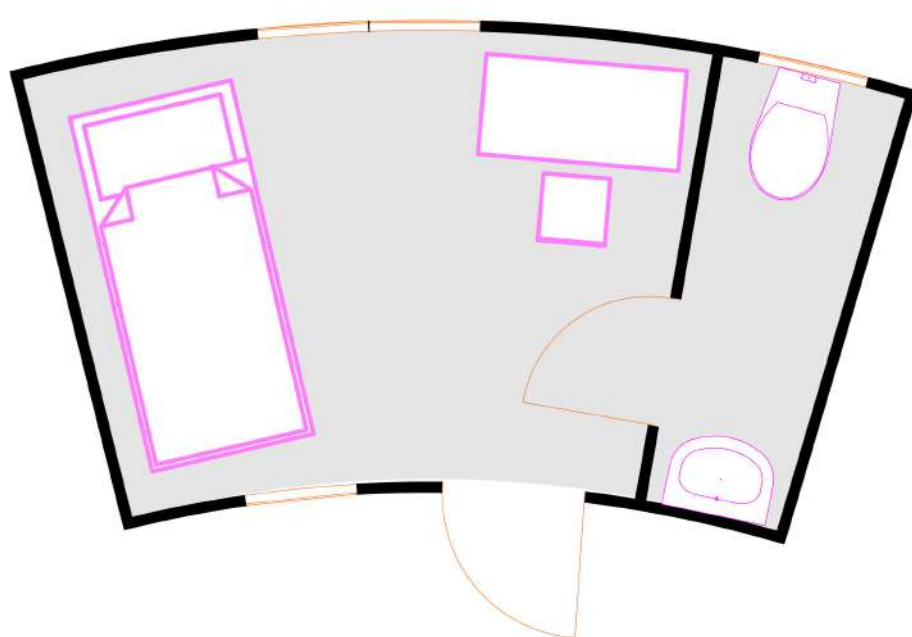


Spaces increase in size from one phase to the other, with increased spatial and interaction privileges at each level.

'Self-Identity is an ever changing concept, so should the space around you.'

Phase 1: Reflection

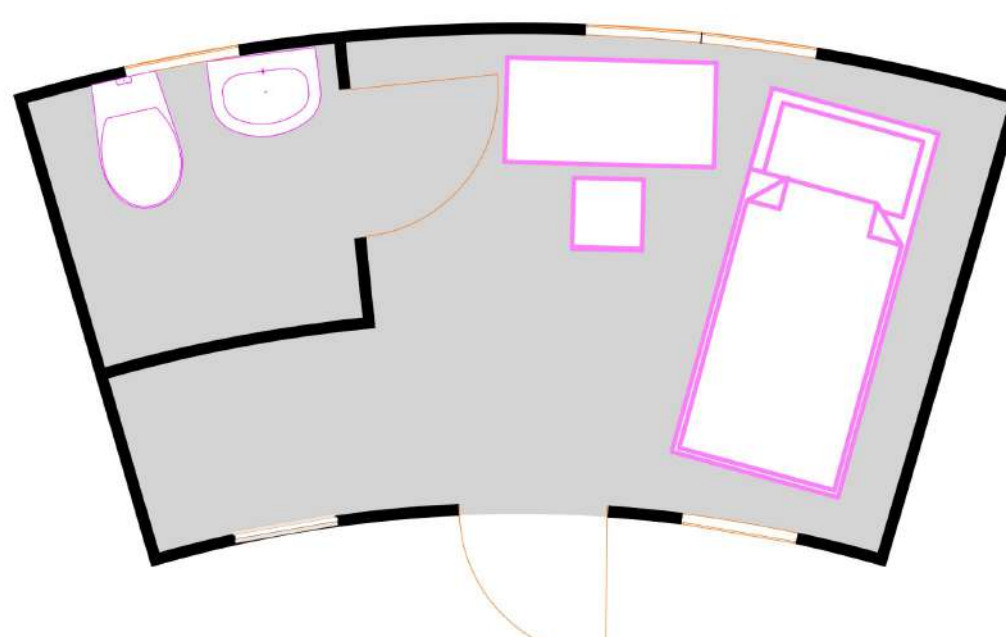
8m<sup>2</sup>



The 'passive' space.  
A processing of emotions.  
Encouraging a stillness needed  
for introspection

Phase 2: Transformation

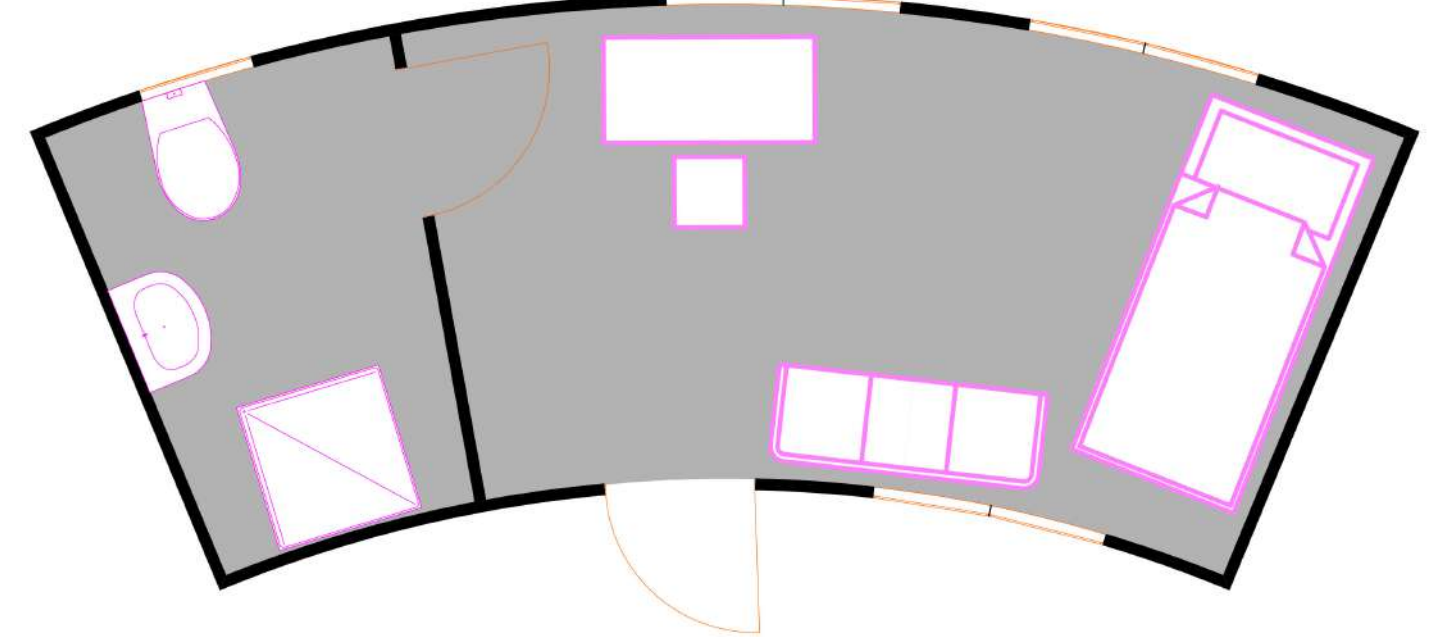
10m<sup>2</sup>



A sense of responsibility.  
Links the experiences gained  
from the first phase and  
prepares them for the next phase

Phase 3: Integration

12m<sup>2</sup>



Active state of being.  
Promoting social connectedness  
and more freedom of choice,  
the balance between routines and the  
formation of relationships.



# PHASE 1: REFLECTION

## The 'passive' space

The first stage in the transmission phases. Its purpose is to allow the inmate who has just been incarcerated to be able to adjust to the new environment. The visible curved shape of the wall creates soft features that are linked to positive associations with a space. Feelings of calm, peacefulness and relaxation. Which is what this first phase aims at for the user.



### Design Strategies

#### People and People

This phase is made to encourage self-reflection and self-regulation

Social interactions are limited since the aim is to provide the user with a stillness and provide them with a space that mostly encourages self controlled actions and a reliance on their internal organization

However, support is offered when needed and visits from family, friends and legal advisors are scheduled

#### Space and People

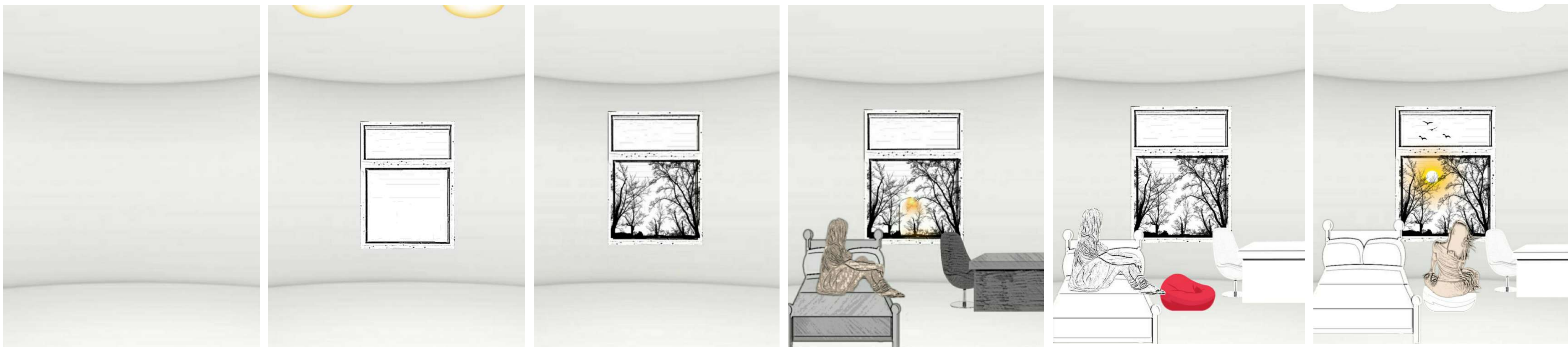
Privacy is a key element in supporting self regulation. This phase gives the user the privacy and stillness needed to adjust to the institution. Through provision of a single room as opposed to sharing the space

Furniture is fixed to provide security and to prevent self-harm due to anger and frustration that may be associated with being incarcerated. There is however, a soft bean bag available to comfortably seat on the floor and enjoy the views outside

Indoor artificial lighting is controlled by the staff in this phase

The large window goes lower than the windows in the other phases as a way to create a connection between the nature outside and the space

### Visual Narratives

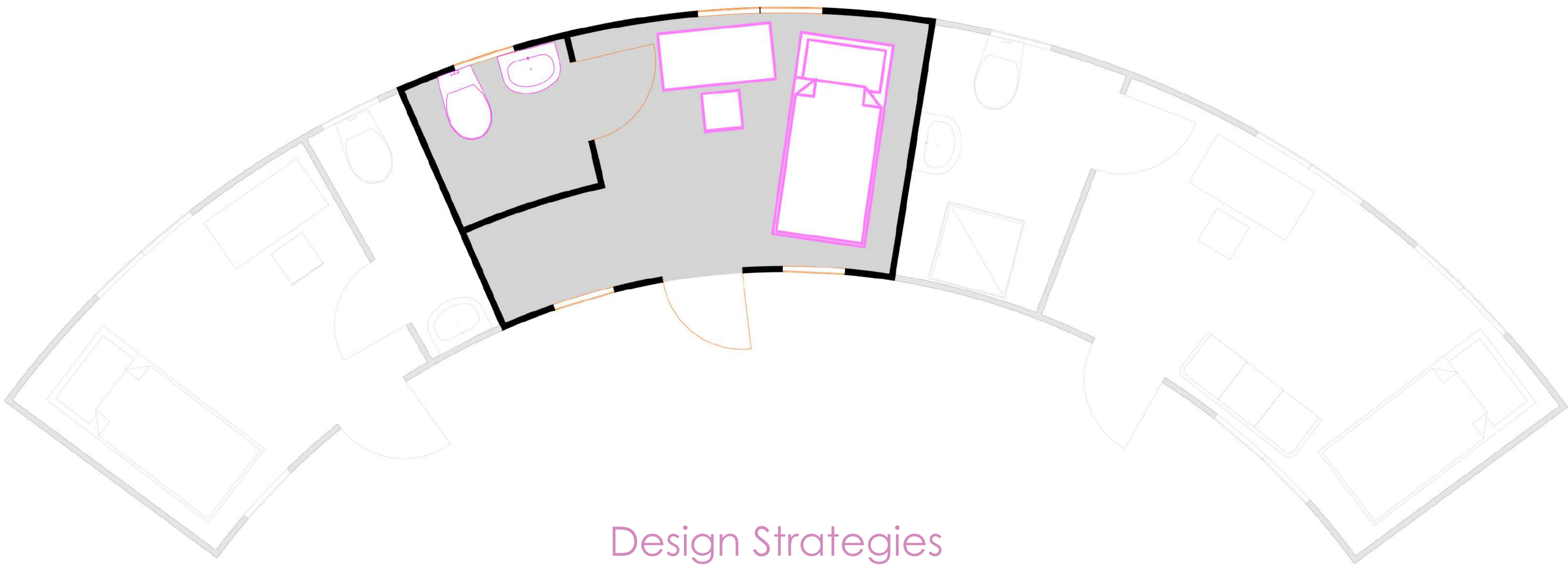




# PHASE 2: TRANSFORMATION

## Sense of Responsibility

The second stage in the phases of transmission. There is an increase in size from the first phase. This phase acts as a link between the past (reflection) and the future (integration). Where the inmate is allowed personal objects and more control over their space.



### People and People

In this phase, the individuals have more visiting hours with legal advisors, family members and friends

There is less supervision by the staff, slowly nurturing a model of trust and nurturing as opposed to one of power and control that is common with traditional prison cells

In the grand scheme of a prison institution, this phase now gives access to sources of entertainment i.e Tv time

### Space and People

Artificial lighting is now controlled by the user of the space

The furniture is movable, to give the user a sense of control with their space

They can customize their spaces by the personal items allowed i.e personal photos

There is a sense of responsibility for instance; cleaning their own space and they can also have indoor plants to take care of

## Visual Narratives

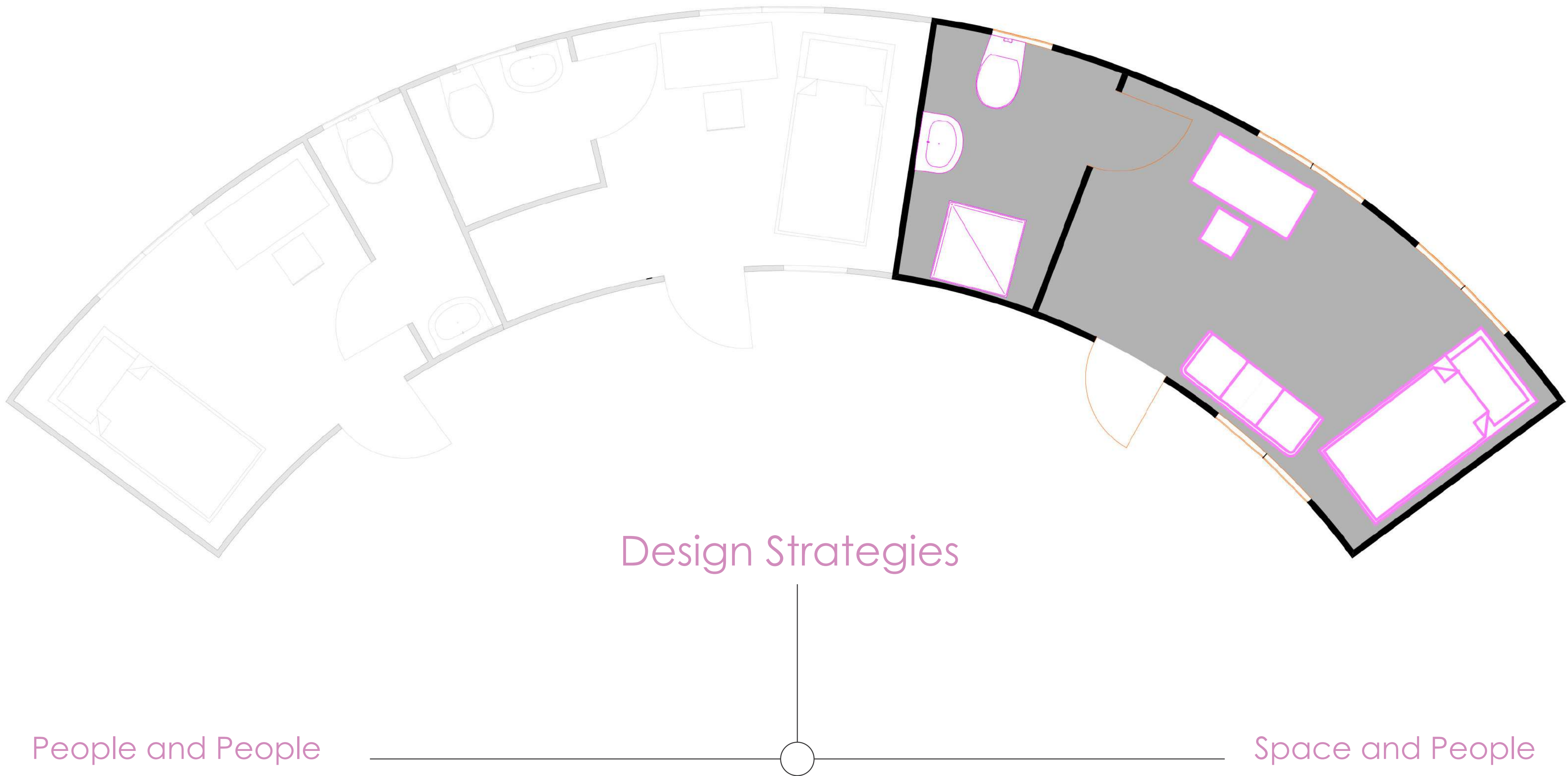




# PHASE 3: INTEGRATION

## Active State of Being

The third and last phase of the transmission phases before the inmate leaves the institution. This space is meant to offer more social interaction between people while providing them with a larger space to customize and encourage more activity, whether alone in the room or with guests. Aiming to prepare them for life outside the institution.



The users can have visitors inside their rooms, indoor games are provided

Longer visiting hours are provided

The individuals who are now in phase 3 are given more responsibility to conduct mentorship programmes for the others in the other phases. It is however a choice and not a mandatory activity

Fully customizable with movable furniture and storage units. There is also a locker provided for personal items

There is a continuation of a sense of responsibility that was afforded in the 2nd phase

Indoor artificial lighting is controlled by the user

The users have more personal items. At this phase, their family members can leave them with items that are first verified by the staff as safe

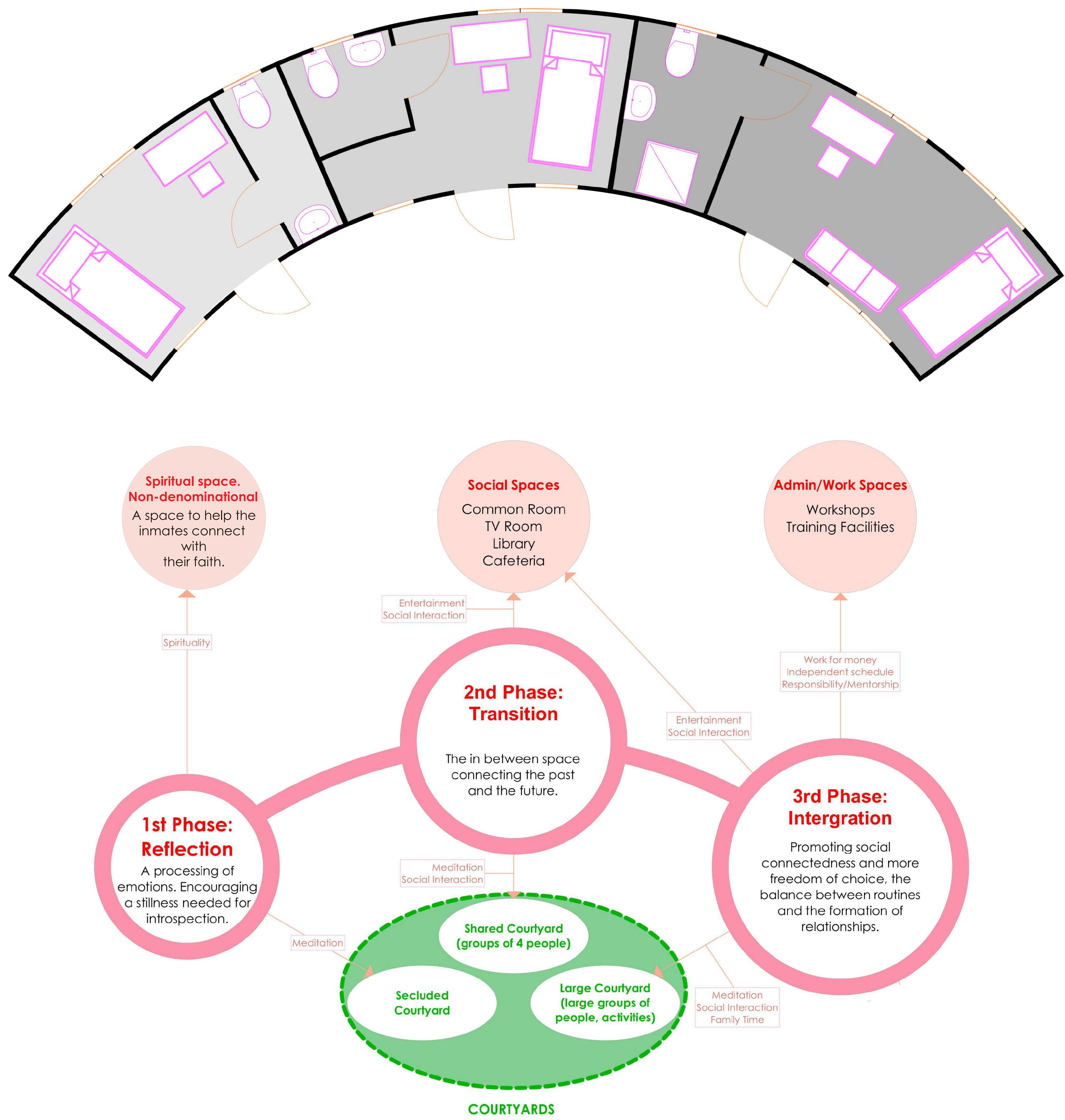
### Visual Narratives





# ABSTRACT SITE MAP

Overall, the transmission phases work to slowly give the inmates a sense of control that is otherwise denied to them once they are incarcerated. Inspired by the importance of keeping our individuality and positive sense of self . As an attempt to link the cell designs with an abstract overall concept, the thesis also imagines an overview of how these phases of the cell designs could work in an overall prison environment and how the inmates would interact with other spaces and people.



Through the creation of of the 3 distinct phases, the emphasis becomes on encouraging constant reinvention through looking inwards and supporting the human nature to live rewardingly with others within and without the prison environment. Ultimately, supporting the continuity of the self through the spaces and ensuring that they are motivated to use their internal organization as opposed to taking on the outwardly composed external structure adopted by the model of power and control that is emphasized in penal institutions.