Running a Usability Study

**Considering your assignment application
from the perspective of usability**

**Figuring out what needs fixing
and how to fix it**

Aims of the study

- **To get a sense of what people actually, really do**
- **To compare and contrast with:**
  - What you do
  - What people like you do
  - What is reported in the literature
  - What is 'common sense'

Usability:
Seeing through a user's eyes

- **Users don't see an application the same way as a designer does**
- **Non-techie users don't see an application the same way as a techie does**
- **Non-expert users don't see an application the same way as a professional does**
- **So… It is really hard for designers to see their interface the way that a user does**
- **Why?**
  - What you see depends on what you know
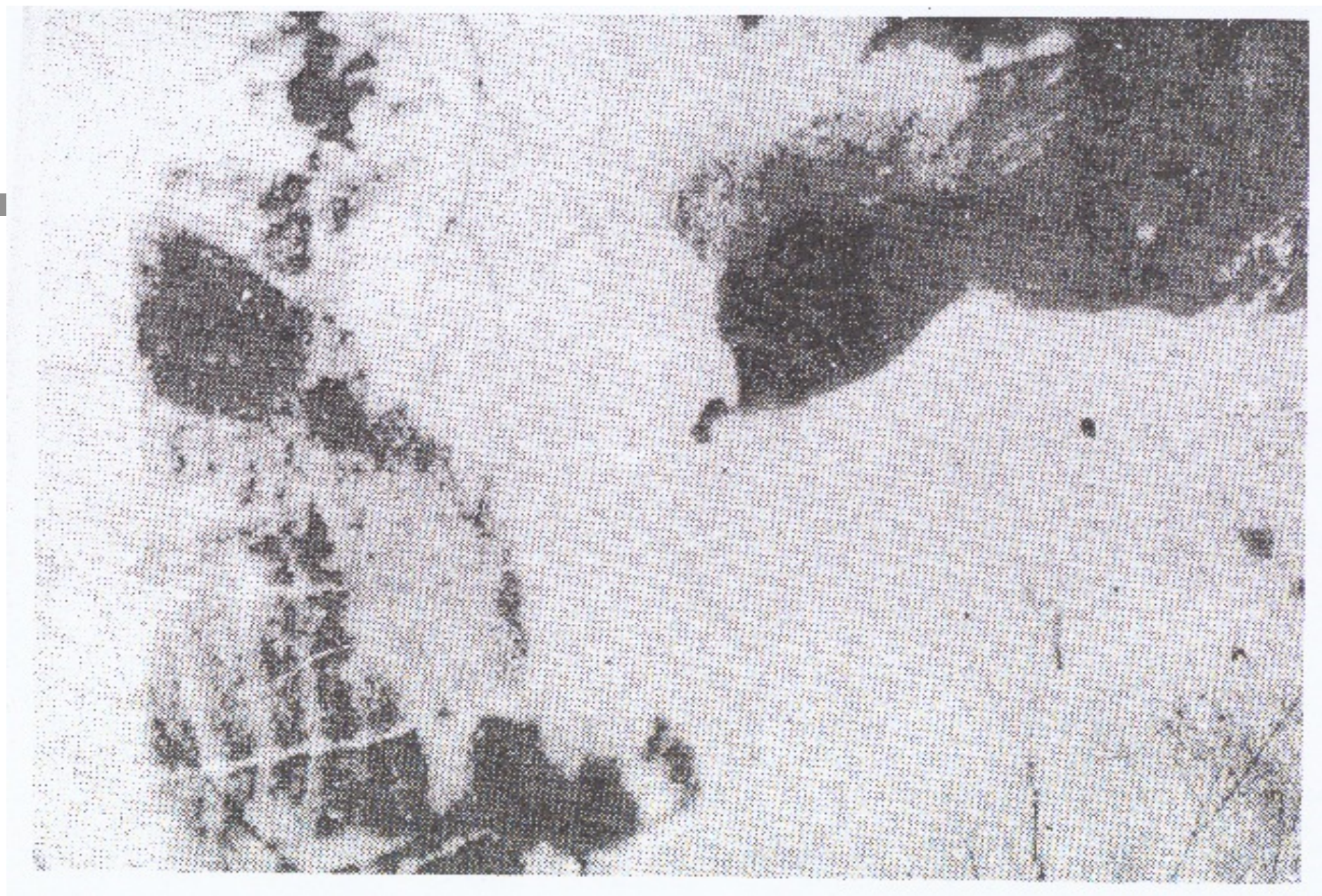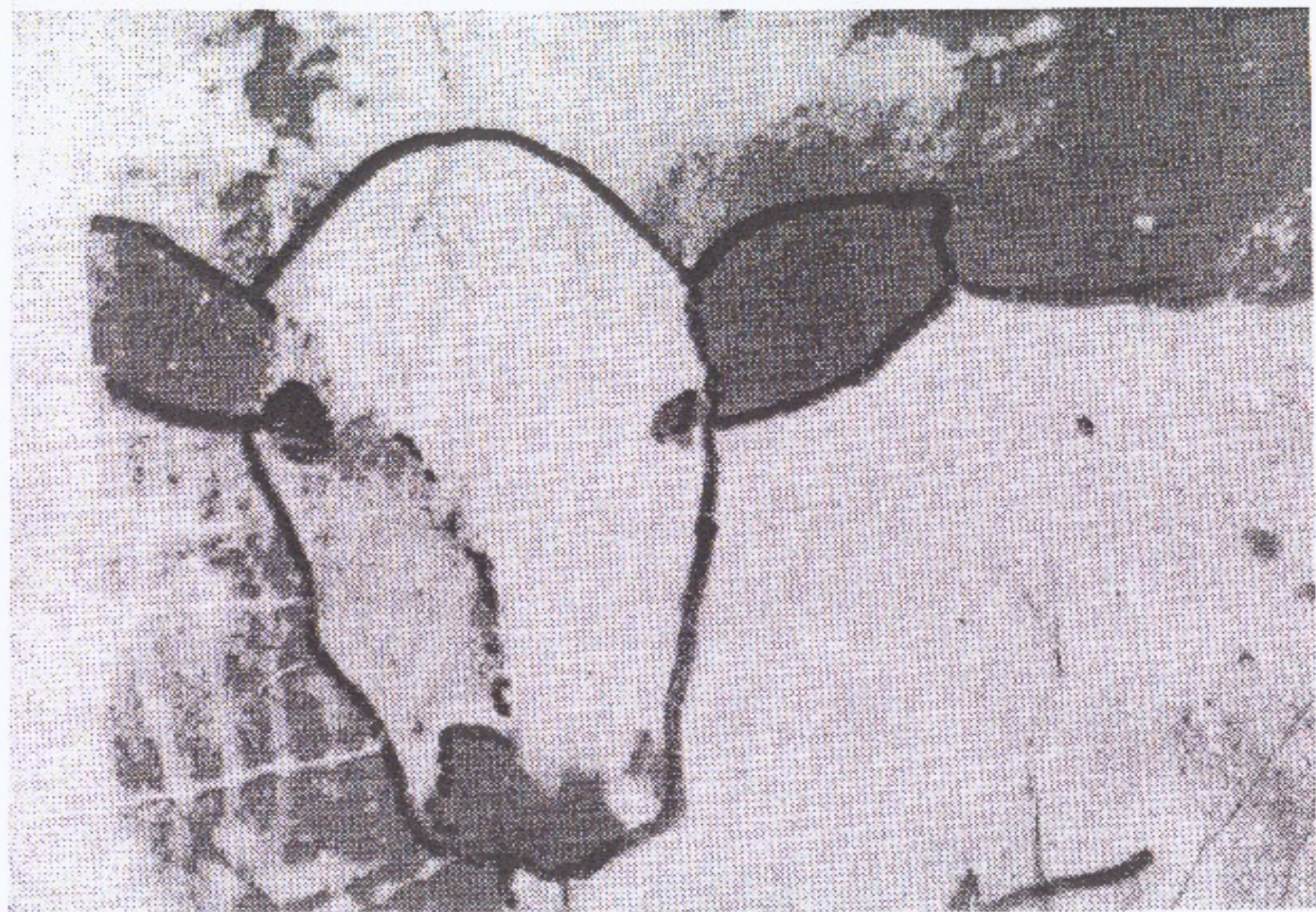
Solution

- **User Studies _may_ help…**
- **…If you do them right**
- **Try to see through the eyes of the other person**
- **Repeat**
- **Analyze**
- **Fix**
- **Repeat**

Planning a user study

- Before
- During
- After

Preparation

- **Which site?**
- **Which part? Why?**
- **What do you know about the users, uses, needs?**
- **What do you suspect about its usability in advance?**
- **Plausible tasks**
- **Create scenarios of need**
- **Real uses you can watch??**
- **Do a dry run. Do another**
- **Recruit friend(s) Can do this with pairs of people**

Running a study

- **Ethics & the Law**
- **Keep your user happy and relaxed**
- **Break all plans to ensure this**
- **It is the right and the rational thing to do**
- **Informed Consent**
- **Can They Say No??**
- **Thanking, payback**

Wording matters

- 'Experiment' => White coats and electrodes
- 'Study' sounds nicer, friendlier. Even better word?
- Driving Test v Test Drive
- It's NOT your fault
- Focus on the fault of the computer
- "Why did you do that?"
- "Why do you think it made you think that?"

Phrasing the tasks

- **You can't guess which words people use to describe their information needs**
  - But you can guess it won't be the ones you thought of!
- **Don't give the game away in the task wording**
- **"Can you find the Funformation section on the site?"**
  - "Funformation?? Oh I'd click on the '*Funformation!!!!*' Link"
- **"Can you find out if there is a special section of the site for children?**
  - "Hmmm. Oh maybe, I'll click on the '*Funformation!!!!*' Link Yes!"

Reporting a study

- **What you did (exactly)**
- **What happened (clearly)**
- **Why (as far as you can guess)**
- **What to do with that knowledge**

Checklist

- 1) Anonymize User
- 2) Background of User
- 3) Details of tasks, exact wording
- 4) What they did
- 5) What is interesting
- 6) What they didn't do
- 7) What was surprising to you
- 8) Why they did it
- 9) Relation to the literature
- 10) Redesign Speculations

Activity

- **Teams of 3 to 4**
- **Create a couple of tasks. Example:**
  - Image you have a family who is thinking of visiting this museum
  - How do you get there?
  - When is it open/closed?
  - How much does it cost for 2 adults & 2 children?
- **Get a volunteer from another group**
- **Run the study**
  - Don't help unless essential
  - Ask followup questions at the end
  - Thank person, send them pack
  - Explain to you volunteering team member what happened
- **Revise task**
  - Tweak, or create some other task
- **Repeat with a new volunteer**