

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Headspace

Amber Marks

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About the Book

This is the true story of what happened when one woman started asking questions about sniffer dogs

It is a chance encounter with a police sniffer dog that first draws criminal lawyer Amber Marks into the hidden world of the science of smell and its law-enforcement applications. Soon she is invited into secret meetings of security big-wigs and stumbles into a wonderland of contemporary surveillance. There she discovers a brave new Britain, where the spying skills of dogs, dolphins and a myriad other critters are being harnessed to create a 'secure world' in which sniffer bees are as important as intelligence agents.

Part exploration of our burgeoning surveillance society, part humorous memoir, Amber's story will capture your imagination and get you wondering: just who stands to benefit from all this 'security'?

About the Author

Amber Marks is a barrister, part-time lecturer in law at King's College London and freelance journalist. This is her first book.

Headspace

Sniffer Dogs, Spy Bees and One Woman's
Adventures in the Surveillance Society

Amber Marks



To Crofton

'You will excuse a certain abstraction of mind, my dear Watson,' said he. 'Some curious facts have been submitted to me within the last twenty-four hours, and they in turn have given rise to some speculations of a more general character. I have serious thoughts of writing a small monograph upon the uses of dogs in the work of the detective.'

'But surely, Holmes, this has been explored,' said I. 'Bloodhounds – sleuth-hounds –'

'No, no, Watson; that side of the matter is, of course, obvious. But there is another which is far more subtle.'

Arthur Conan Doyle, The Adventures of the Creeping Man

Part I

CHAPTER ONE

The Baying of the Hounds

Lear: Thou has seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

Gloucester: Ay, sir.

Lear: And the creature run from the cur? There thou mightst behold the great image of authority: a dog's obey'd in office.

William Shakespeare, King Lear

THE FIRST TIME I was sniffed by a dog I was seven. I entered a room full of grown ups and someone's dog headed straight for my crotch, stuck its nose up between my legs and sniffed. It then wrapped its paws around my leg and started to hump me so hard I fell to the floor. It was my first sexual experience. It was unconsensual and took me by surprise. I blamed myself.

Smell has historical associations with sin, which may be why the experience of being sniffed is unnerving. Patrick Süskind sums up its invasiveness in his novel about a freak of nature called Grenouille who hunts down his victims by their scent and murders them to preserve their human essence for his personal perfume collection. The novel begins when Grenouille is a baby. A priest is cradling Grenouille in his arms, when he wrinkles his little nose:

It was establishing his scent! And all at once he felt as if he stank . . . The child seemed to be smelling right through his skin, into his innards. His most tender emotions, his filthiest thoughts lay exposed to that greedy little nose . . .

The first time the police dog penetrated my consciousness was when I was working as a barrister in connection with a liquor licensing application. It was traditional for licensing sessions to begin with an address to the magistrates by a representative of the area's police force on its latest initiatives. I was sitting on the bench waiting for the officer to finish before I could make my application.

'We will be taking police sniffer dogs around pubs and clubs in the area to detect drug users on the premises,' he stated proudly.

The announcement of this initiative surprised and unnerved me. The British Pub would take on a different character with police dogs sniffing around the feet of those relaxing with friends after a night of debauchery. Had dope smokers lost the right to drink? I made a note to research this initiative.

I might have forgotten this incident had further encounters not swiftly followed.

Walking into Fulham Broadway underground station, I saw officers holding dogs on leashes, encouraging them to sniff the crotches of passing commuters. I approached one of the policemen and asked him what was the purpose of this operation.

'I can't say.'

Luckily, I was wearing a suit and I apologised for my curiosity, explaining that I was a lawyer with a professional interest in crime. He looked at me with something approaching interest.

'Well, you know that most crime is caused by drugs?'

'Yes,' I lied and nodded.

Artificial affinity had been achieved.

'Well, these dogs can smell the smallest trace of a drug on a person. A lot of people take drugs and once the dog has picked up a scent of drugs on them, we have the right to search them. If we find drugs on them we can then search

their homes and in their homes we usually find all manner of incriminating articles.'

Now I understood. Who needs a warrant when you've got a dog? Restrictions on police powers were being circumvented by a dog's bark. Man's best friend was a Judas. I nodded approvingly at him.

'The Muslims don't like it though,' he added, 'or the Chinese.' The officer didn't seem particularly upset by this. I thanked him and went on my way.

On my way back from court a few weeks later, I was walking through Clapham Junction station subway when I saw a group of officers with a black dog. The dog handler was tall and chubby with a dirty smile. The officers had stopped to chat amongst themselves just past one of the stairwells. A little black girl stood guarding a suitcase for her mother at the bottom of the steps. The dog kept going over to her case but the handler took no interest. I heard one of the nicer-looking officers ask the handler why it kept going over to her. The handler beamed and laughed.

'He can smell she's black can't he?'

Somewhat revolted by this scene I told my mother about it. It didn't faze her at all. 'Oh I know,' she said. 'I have read about it in *The Daily Bulletin*.'

The Daily Bulletin is the local ex-pat paper in Majorca and often contains snippets from Reuters not picked up on elsewhere in the media.

'In fact there is a case going through the courts at the moment in which the police are being sued for training their dogs to go after black people.'

Did different races emit distinct odours? It seemed unlikely to me but perhaps nothing could be dismissed as impossible in this strange new world of olfactory policing. There was something unnerving about the prospect of being sniffed by a police dog but I couldn't put my finger on what. Perhaps it was the deeply entrenched cultural association

between sniffing and snooping. Inquisitive people have historically been derided for their nosiness.

Fed up with the unpaid hours of work required to defend suspects properly, I decided to accept a well-paid office job as a government lawyer in the Court of Appeal. Tracy, a solicitor who had regularly instructed me when I'd worked as a barrister, called me one day out of the blue after I'd been working in the office for several months and we arranged to meet for coffee opposite the Royal Courts of Justice.

'So what are you up to?'

'Bit fed up with the day job - too much administration.'

'That's office life.'

'I'm thinking of undertaking some legal research into sniffer dogs.'

'Really, that will be interesting.' She pulled her Gucci sunglasses back over her heavily made up eyes and took a drag on a Benson and Hedges. 'My client's wife had a run in with them only yesterday.' She passed the packet of cigarettes over to me.

'Do tell,' I begged, discarding my slice of cake and resolution to give up smoking and taking one of her Bensons.

'She went in to visit him in Belmarsh prison. She was sat in the waiting room when the guards walked a sniffer dog past the line of waiting visitors. The dog barked at her and another woman who were then taken into another room. They were told to wait there for female officers to arrive who could search them.' She took a bite of quiche between drags. 'Anyway, they were in there waiting for a while before the other woman turned to speak to her. "I'm worried," she said, "I don't have anything on me but I do have my period." "So do I," replied my client's wife. "Isn't it embarrassing?" Interesting huh? Neither of them had drugs

on them but both were menstruating and the dog singled them out.'

'That is interesting. It hadn't occurred to me that the dogs weren't reliable. I've been too wound up about their use in the first place. I mean, since when do the police have a mandate to sniff around in the hope of finding something chargeable? And what about privacy? What's more personal than the way I smell?'

'Have you read Ana Funder's *Stasiland*?' she asked.

'No. What is it?'

'It's a book about the Stasi.'

'Which is what?'

'The Stasi was the secret police in East Germany. Its objective was total control of the population and its means was to know everything about everyone. They turned the German Democratic Republic - I think that's what it was called - into a police state. Everyone living there was terrified of being spied on, informed upon or arrested. The police had a file on everyone.' Tracy took another drag on her cigarette and exhaled pensively. 'It was weird the information they collected. They used it to intimidate people. They scared the crap out of one girl by telling her that they knew her little sister wanted to study music at college. I think they implied they could put a stop to it or something. Anyway, I can't remember what there is on sniffing in her book, but there is something.'

I purchased a copy the next day. In the first chapter, Ana Funder visits the Stasi museum, located in the former headquarters of the Stasi in Leipzig.

The Stasi had developed a quasi-scientific method, 'smell sampling', as a way to find criminals. The theory was that we all have our own identifying odour, which we leave on everything we touch. These smells can be captured and, with the help of trained sniffer dogs, compared to find a match . . .

Mostly, smell samples were collected surreptitiously. The Stasi might sneak into someone's apartment and take a piece of clothing worn close

to the skin, often underwear. Alternatively a 'suspect' would be brought in under some pretext for questioning, and the vinyl seat he or she had sat on would be wiped afterward with a cloth. The pieces of stolen clothing, or cloth, would then be placed in a sealed jar. The containers looked like jam bottling jars. A label read: 'Name: Herr [Name]. Time: 1 hour. Object: Worker's Underpants.'

Leipzig Stasi had collected smell samples of the entire political opposition in this part of Saxony. No-one knows who has these scraps of material and old socks now, nor what they might be keeping them for.

If nothing else, this was material for a viable conspiracy theory on the common problem of disappearing socks. I wondered if the UK authorities had been aware of the Stasi work and whether the increasing number of dogs on our streets was somehow related. I also wondered who had the missing Stasi samples.

I did an internet search on the Stasi. Rumours abounded about its former head being hired by the US Homeland Security Department. The Homeland Security Department is the US equivalent of the UK's Home Office. The Department's activities since its establishment shortly after 9/11 have been controversial and it has been criticised for attempting to turn the US population into a network of spies. I had a vague recollection of Wernher von Braun, the Nazi rocket scientist subsequently taken on by the US to develop weapons of war. Perhaps they were recruiting experts in controlling internal populations for the war on terror.

I started talking to everyone I met about sniffer dogs. Almost everyone had their own story. The topic was so absurd it even worked, I thought, as a method for chatting up men. I started to chase a ridiculously handsome civil liberties campaigner called Tom, with whom I had shared an animated pub conversation about police dogs. We met for a drink and weren't able to re-capture the energy of our first conversation. I got very drunk and the date, if that's what it was, ended with him carrying me home while I vomited over his shoulder. I was too embarrassed for a long time after

that to contact him again. I wouldn't hear anything from him and then out of the blue my phone would ping and a text from him would read: 'Guardian. Page 5. Good doggy story xxx'. It slowly dawned on me that I had trained this man to think of me every time he saw a dog; not the best pick-up trick in the book.

A barrister friend of mine was representing a man charged under the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1874 for allegedly hitting a sniffer dog on the nose. Proof that the dog had been injured was the dog handler's evidence that the dog had yelped. There was scope for some decent cross-examination there.

A man I met in a club was leaning against the wall of WHSmith in Victoria station when a dog came and sat next to him. The dog's owner, a policeman, approached him and told him he was lucky his dog was still in training for passive drug detection duties, otherwise he would have had to search him. Passive drug detection, I was later to learn, was the latest fashion in dog training. Instead of barking at its suspect, the dog was trained to sit down next to them.

A *Big Issue* vendor told me his life was destroyed by a sniffer dog. Homeless and fleeing drug addiction in London, he was boarding a train to his parents' house when a sniffer dog barked loudly at him. The police came running over and asked him for his details. They looked him up, found out he had outstanding warrants, hauled him off the train and locked him up. He was unable to fathom the scent that had alerted the dog to him.

A friend and heavy cannabis smoker had been stopped every morning on his way to work by barking dogs and dog handlers asserting a right to search him at Seven Sisters station. On the twelfth occasion he objected, complaining they made him late for work and they should know by now that he never had anything on him. The dogs continued to bark and the officers persisted in searching him on a daily

basis. Eventually he contacted a solicitor. The solicitor wrote to the police and the searches stopped.

Friends, aware of my interest, started to send me articles they came across.

One was about a headmaster who had told his pupils to line their bags up outside and congregate in the assembly room. While he talked, police officers, who had been invited on to the school grounds, had their dogs sniff the children's bags for drugs.

I thought I'd phone the Home Office to find the official policy on sniffer dogs.

'Hello. Can you tell me if you have any guidance on sniffer dogs?'

The man on the end of the telephone sniggered.

'On what?'

'Sniffer dogs.'

'No, I don't think so.'

'Well, do you have any publications on sniffer dogs at all?'

'No, I don't think so,' he laughed again.

'Well that is odd, because a large number of police forces seem to have started using them. Are you sure the Home Office doesn't have any information on them?'

'Not that I have come across. I suggest you try the police.'

I phoned up a friend and former head of the drug squad.

'What do you know about sniffer dogs?'

'Nothing, never had anything to do with them.'

'But it must have been when you were in charge that the police started to use them for finding drugs?'

'As I say, I don't remember having anything to do with them. A friend of mine runs a dog training school though. I'll have a word. I'm sure he won't mind you making a visit.'

'Fantastic,' I said. 'Thanks very much.'

Over Christmas in Majorca I had coffee with an ex-boyfriend who now works as a policeman. I told him about my research. He told me that they were setting up a canine unit

on the island. He was sure it was for explosive detection only. I had my doubts given the ever-increasing demands put upon law enforcement by the War on Drugs.

I met up with a local legalise cannabis activist, and tried to alarm him with stories of whom the dogs were being used against in the UK and the news that a canine unit was planned for Majorca.

'Tranquila Ambar. They won't do that here. Not in Majorca. I tell you why. We had a protest recently. It was stopped by the police who beat the protestors with sticks. The next day, one of these policemen goes round to his uncle's house and sits down at the kitchen table. "Get out," shouts his uncle. "You can't beat me with a stick one day and expect a meal the next." Majorcans would never allow the state to sniff our balls. If they start trying to behave here like that with those dogs, the dogs will be killed. "Who killed my dog?" the officer will ask. "What dog?" they will reply.' He shook his head and walked across the room. 'No, the Majorcans won't stand for it, even less so if the dog is not a Majorcan breed.'

I contacted the civil liberties organisation where Tom worked and got put through to him. I hadn't talked to him since a brief conversation the day after our disastrous date.

'Hello, it's Amber.'

'Hello, how are you?'

'Good. Good. Much better thanks. Still very embarrassed and grateful.'

'Honestly, Amber, it happens to everyone. It was no trouble at all. How have you been?'

'Busy, busy. You know how it is.' I haven't been thinking of you day in day out. I am not phoning you on the pretext of work just to talk to you. This dog-sniffing thing is serious. 'I was wondering if you had carried out any research into the civil liberties implications of the increasing use of sniffer dogs.'

He laughed. 'Animal rights you mean?'

As far as I was aware, his organisation didn't campaign for the rights of animals.

'No. I think the use of police dogs in an increasing range of public settings has implications for all of us.'

'Well, you can write something on it for our website if you want. We could probably fit it in during our silly season. No offence but it does have comedy value.'

'OK, I'll be in touch.'

Was I wrong to take this dog thing seriously? Was my obsession with dogs a sophisticated twist on my crush on this man? Was I barking up the wrong tree?

Then the Abu Ghraib story broke. The papers and television news were filled with photos of Arab prisoners being tortured by American soldiers. Journalists ranted about the hoods, knickers and nudity. I noticed the large Alsatian dogs in the photos, and remembered what the officer had told me in Fulham Broadway station about Muslims not liking them. Historians researching the mythology of the dog in Anglo-Saxon, Viking and medieval times claimed that its use by marauding invaders had cemented it in the popular psyche as a 'potent embodiment' of the threat to an existing social order. An article in the *Observer* described the police dog as 'the public face of the War on Terror'. I was sure there were dark forces afoot in this dog business and I decided it was time for some serious research.

Swarm of bees grounds UK aircraft

BBC NEWS
25 May 2007

Almost 200 passengers found themselves stranded at Bournemouth Airport for 11 hours after their plane turned back after flying into a swarm of bees.

CHAPTER TWO

The Psychic Connection

I can feel that least black boy out there coming up the hall, smelling out for my fear. He opens out his nostrils like black funnels, his outsized head bobbing this way and that as he sniffs, and he sucks in fear from all over the ward. He's smelling me now. I can hear him snort. He don't even know where I'm hid, but he's smelling and he's hunting around. I try to keep still.

Ken Kesey, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

SEVERAL MONTHS LATER, frustrated with my day-job and increasingly fascinated by the historical use of working dogs, I found myself cycling home behind a bus with a British Transport Police poster on the back of it announcing the advent of the Year of the Dog. The poster showed a police officer with a dog on a leash and wished me a Happy New Year. The next day I phoned up the press office of British Transport Police and asked where I could find the policy initiative behind the increasing deployment of drug detection dogs in London stations. They told me there was none and that the increase was simply due to the fact that they had more dogs these days.

I was wary of this growing army of police dogs, having discovered a long-standing relationship between dogs and authoritarianism. Christopher Columbus had introduced dogs to North America to terrorise the natives. Further use was made of them during the American Civil War when they were let loose on runaway slaves. In Nazi Germany the SS conditioned their dogs to savage anyone who was not in

uniform. Himmler chose to arm guards in female concentration camps with dogs instead of guns on the basis that dogs would frighten women more. He ordered that the dogs be used to suppress the first sign of revolt. Forced sex with trained dogs was used in Chile, under Pinochet's rule, as a form of torture. In 1950s North America, rock 'n' roll concert attendees were greeted by snarling vicious dogs in the guise of 'agents of society's disapproval' and in the 1960s dogs were routinely used on protesters against the Vietnam War and during race riots.

The US Defense Department has observed that the mere presence of a dog can create anxiety and that dogs can be used as both a psychological and physical deterrent. According to US officials, military working dogs are 'effective in setting the atmosphere' for obtaining information. Dogs were, and may still be, used to induce fear and stress in detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. A company currently providing services to armies around the world claims to make handler and dog function as a single entity through its employment of 'psychic and mental methods from the Eastern Bloc'. Its dogs are imported from the Czech Republic and Slovakia and the company claims that they contain a 'switch' to go 'from nice to nightmare'. The dogs are described as 'the best instrument' for the 'War on Terror'. Was this because of their effect on the atmosphere? Given the repressive connotations of the dog, I found it surprising that the police in democratic countries are so keen on using them in schools and stations. I hadn't appreciated that this was where the War on Terror would be waged.

I attributed the lack of controversy over the use of dogs to the fantastic PR job done on them. Potentially lethal, they were also man's best friend. According to an article in *Fortune*, an American business magazine, there was just something about a dog's word: 'From Lassie to Rin Tin Tin, all the way back to Odysseus's dog Argos (the only one to recognise Homer's hero after his 20 year absence), our

culture is littered with testaments to the honest dog and his reliable nose.' Judging from an early twentieth-century account, cited in Martin Cotter's *All About German Shepherd Dogs*, the Dog Detective was an early embodiment of Poirot:

After taking a few deep sniffs around the bloodstained bed the dog set off down the stairs to the yard below, where all the staff, male and female, were assembled and were standing apprehensively, in a close group. No one dared to move, as the dog approached and started circling the group, snuffling deeply. The tension was reaching breaking point when the dog started to growl and focused his attention on a particular person. Growling menacingly the dog moved closer to the man, while the rest held their breath, petrified. Then the man's nerve snapped and he made a furtive movement. Instantly the dog sprang and gripping him by the thigh, brought him to the ground. The dog had made no mistake; in addition to the first scent picked up by the bedside and tracked to the man, fear and guilt had made the adrenaline flow in a peculiar mixture and the chemical reaction gave off an odour which the dog recognized. The dog understood the furtive movement entitled him to make an arrest and not let the man get away.

Pleading for the dog to be called off, the murderer made a complete confession of his crime, before everyone right there on the spot. He was sentenced to death and while awaiting execution, told his gaolers he did not fear the gallows nearly so much as he did fear the dog, with flashing teeth and snapping jaws, which, ever and always haunted him in his sleep.

It sounded like he had confessed out of fear to me and I wondered if he could have been innocent.

I'd heard the phrase 'Pavlov's dogs' and knew it was important stuff, but I hadn't had cause to look into it before reading that current dog training is still based on Pavlov's early twentieth-century methods of Classical Conditioning. Pavlov was a Russian psychologist and physiologist whose main interest was the control of the nervous system. He observed that dogs salivate when they eat. This he described as a simple reflex action. He further observed that dogs would salivate at the sight of food. He hypothesised that this was a more complicated response than a mere reflex action and that it involved a psychical event. The dog, he argued, had learned by experience to associate that sort

of visual stimulus with eating. It occurred to Pavlov to experiment with whether this one-link chain of association could be lengthened. Thus he would start by ringing a bell before presenting food to the dog. After a sufficient number of such experiences the dog would associate the ringing of the bell with the appearance of food, and would salivate when the bell rang and before the food had appeared. Such a reaction is called a 'conditioned reflex'. Pavlov tried various stimuli – noises, colours, shapes, touches on various parts of the body, electric shocks – and found that the dog could learn to regard any such stimulus as the prelude to being fed. Ironically, given the current applications of Pavlovian trained dogs, the only stimuli he found difficult to apply with any reliably predictive value were smells:

It has been exceedingly difficult, if not impossible up to the present, to obtain the same accuracy in graduation of olfactory stimuli as of any other stimuli. It is impossible also to limit the action of olfactory stimuli to any exact length of time. Furthermore, we do not know of any subjective or objective criterion by which small variations in intensity of odours can be determined . . .

In the course of his experiments, Pavlov observed that dogs exhibit all the symptoms of a nervous breakdown when subjected to prolonged physical or psychic stress. Shortly before reaching this point of final breakdown, they become more than normally suggestible. This is when new behaviour patterns can be installed most efficiently. Those installed at this juncture will be ineradicable; that which the dog has learned under stress will remain an integral part of its make-up. Pavlov's speculation that the actual cells of the central nervous system might change structurally and chemically when a new behaviour pattern is formed has since been confirmed by neuroscientists. This would no doubt account for the anecdotes I'd heard about ex-sniffer dogs continuing to seek out cocaine in their retirement. Their training had become hard-wired. Even more interesting was Pavlov's conviction that trained dogs could pass their lessons on

through their genes, endowing future generations with freshly conditioned neural links. This theory was adopted from Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, a nineteenth-century zoologist who coined the term 'biology' and divided the animal kingdom into vertebrates and invertebrates. Lamarck's theory of evolution, which even Darwin found persuasive, is known as the 'inheritance of acquired characteristics'.

So immersed was I in my research that I'd almost forgotten Tom. Then he texted me. He'd had an encounter with a sniffer dog. Serves him right for not taking the topic seriously, I thought, but I couldn't get the possibility of speaking to him out of my mind. I made my way outside to the foyer of the British Library, sat on a cold marble plinth and dialled his number.

'Hey Tom, it's Amber.'

'Amber. Hey, how are you?' Strangely, he sounded surprised to hear from me.

'Good thanks. Been busy. I gave a talk to lawyers on the legality of sniffer dogs the other day. It actually raises all sorts of interesting legal issues.' I felt like I was babbling defensively to prove I hadn't been thinking about him pointlessly all day every day since we'd last spoken. 'How are you?'

'All right. Sorry I haven't been in touch for ages. I've been working non-stop. I'm orchestrating a campaign against Total Surveillance. You wouldn't believe how quickly we are becoming a police state. One company is even running a fingerprinting system in British schools. Guess what the system is called.'

'I don't know,' I replied pathetically. I felt the loss of all capacity for dialogue whenever I spoke to him and it made me nervous.

'It's called VeriCool.'

'No way!'

'Yeah.'

‘How do schools justify taking their kids’ fingerprints to the parents?’

‘All sorts of bizarre ways. One school claimed it was a simple and fun way for the library to keep track of who had what books.’

‘That’s absurd.’

‘I know. Oh by the way, I found out where the expression barking up the wrong tree comes from.’

‘Where?’ I laughed, thinking that perhaps he did love me after all.

‘Apparently the doggy has been getting the wrong end of the stick for donkeys’ years.’

‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘It’s an early nineteenth-century expression from when they used dogs to hunt racoons. The dogs were trained to bark at the foot of whichever tree the racoon had run up. It’s a reference to the waste of the huntsmen’s time and energy by the dog barking up the wrong one.’

‘Well you know,’ I said excitedly, ‘they do seem to be wrong a lot of the time. I got talking to someone from Action on Rights for Children recently as they’ve had a number of complaints from innocent children searched as a result of police dog indications. Apparently one got told, after he was searched, that he must have come from a venue where drugs were being used. He was able to prove he’d spent the day at the Department of Education and the police officer finally apologised for his accusatory manner. But I interviewed the press contact for the British Transport Police the other day and asked him how often the dogs got it wrong and he said it was “impossible to tell”. He said that when the person is found not to have any drugs on them it is because the dog is “so sensitive” it can detect the scent on you if you have brushed past someone who is carrying drugs. So even when they are wrong they are right.’

Tom explained that a number of detection technologies fell into the ‘over-sensitive’ category. They enabled the

police to investigate and ask innocent civilians to explain their whereabouts and provide personal details by triggering false positives. People were normally so alarmed by having triggered a response from the detection device that they divulged all manner of personal information. The information was then entered on to a record and stored for future use. He said it was very similar to the Total Information Awareness programme in the US.

'Sounds like the real reason for the large-scale deployment of dogs is to widen the net of surveillance over the general population. Pigs using dogs to fish humans!' he joked.

Finally, I thought. He was beginning to see some relevance in my research.

'So what encounter did you have with a dog?' I asked.

'I was coming out of Highbury and Islington station and saw police with dogs to the left and so went right. The police followed me and stopped and searched me.'

'What reason did they give for the search?'

'They said they saw me change my direction on spotting the dog.'

'That's not a valid reason for stop and search. Any chance I could have a copy of your search record?'

'Absolutely. It's yours. We should meet up anyway.'

'Yeah. That would nice.'

'Maybe get some dinner or something.'

'Sure,' I said, hoping he'd suggest a date.

'OK. Speak to you soon.'

'OK. Bye.'

He hung up. I'd forgotten to tell him that dogs were historically symbolic of authoritarian regimes. I couldn't call him back just to tell him that. He'd think I was nuts. Total Surveillance? What sort of information would be useful to an authoritarian regime?

My thoughts were redirected by the sound of my telephone ringing. It was a withheld number.

‘Hello?’

‘Is that Amber Marks?’

‘Yes.’

‘Hello. This is Clare from the mental health trust. A colleague gave me your details. He heard a talk you gave on sniffer dogs at a seminar. I understand that you know quite a lot about them.’

‘Yes.’

‘Well then it probably won’t surprise you to hear that there is a lot of enthusiasm for using them in psychiatric wards. I have to draft our trust policy on their use and I was hoping you would be willing to help me.’

Knowing what I did about dogs, I was amazed that the National Health Service was planning on using them on such a vulnerable section of the population.

‘Why is there so much enthusiasm?’ I asked. ‘Aren’t you concerned about the atmosphere they’ll create on the ward?’

‘HM Prison Service has been using mental health hospitals as training grounds for their dogs for some time now.’

This struck me as odd.

‘We are looking,’ she continued, ‘for measures to keep drugs out of our wards and so we are thinking of introducing dogs.’

‘And why do you think dogs are an effective means of keeping drugs out?’

‘Initially I was against them. I mean, they are used in prisons and prisons remain full of drugs. But after listening to our Criminal Justice Advisor I can see why they are a good idea. We could get ourselves into legal difficulties unless we can show we are taking all reasonable measures to keep illegal drugs out of our premises.’

‘Who is your Criminal Justice Advisor?’

‘Walter Penay. He’s a retired police officer and is very knowledgeable about criminal justice matters.’

In my experience, police officers are rarely that clued up on the law and the rights of mental health patients is a complicated area. No doubt he was very much aware of the illegality of drug use, but what about human rights? Clare gave me Walter's phone number and I left a message asking if he would be willing to meet and share his expertise on dogs with me.

The next morning I picked up a voicemail message from Walter. He was free to meet at lunchtime. A few hours later we were sitting in a cafe, sipping apple juice. He informed me that his consultation had concluded and he had recommended the use of drug detection dogs on wards on a pilot basis.

'I've got the police to agree to provide them for free.' The possibility of the police charging for this service hadn't even occurred to me.

'What evidence did you find that they were an accurate detection tool?' I asked him.

'None,' he said firmly. 'But from my years of experience in the police force and working with units using dogs I know that they are very good. Handlers would put money on their accuracy. And,' he added, 'the dogs act as a deterrent to drug use. They are much more efficient at detection than police officers and everyone knows that they are. They may be attributed skills that they don't have but so what?' He shrugged contentedly.

'How did the patients you consulted feel about the idea?'

'Some complained that we were treating them like prisoners. Some thought it might heighten the paranoia of patients on the ward.'

'Isn't that a serious concern?' I asked.

'There is a natural fear of dogs in some people,' he explained. 'It is like the fear of spiders.'

'So the patients don't want dog visits?' I wanted to change the subject from spiders.

'When we *first* mentioned the idea of bringing dogs in a lot of people had images of rottweilers and German shepherds. In fact the dog used is a springer spaniel, which is very small, lovely and fluffy.'

I'd read up on the springer spaniel, having spotted them with police on the underground. It was a 'reliable hunter', a 'family friend'; or, in the words of the poet Jon Gay, a 'fawning slave to man's deceit'. Evidently it was now taking on a new role, as an institutional pet; a 'noser out of unorthodoxy', to borrow a phrase from George Orwell.

'In fact,' Walter continued chirpily, 'taking the dogs in is usually enjoyed by the patients. They usually want to pat the spaniel. It is good for the relationship between the patients and police officers because the patients see that police officers are human, often chatty and don't have two heads!' he explained.

A police officer accompanied by a dog seemed an odd way to convince persons of unsound mind that police officers were human and didn't have two heads but I wasn't there to argue. Busting mental health patients for using drugs of their choice also seemed an odd way to foster good relations between them and the police.

'I've got a picture of one of our spaniels here,' he said, reaching into his black leather briefcase and taking out a poster. 'We put these posters up around the wards months before taking the dogs in.'

A curly-haired spaniel was pictured on the grass. Its eyes were red. A lead was attached to its collar but the picture did not include to whom or what it was attached. 'Drug Dogs are Used on These Premises', read the caption.

'What is the purpose of these posters?'

'It tends to have the effect of fostering acquiescence to their use. And it tells them what the dogs are looking for.'

'I see.'

'Of course, there is a possibility that the dog picks up on the scent of fear but this is something you would have to