

Secrets of a canine mind

By Jeffrey Kluger, *Time*

Odds are you don't look forward to spending time in a magnetic resonance imager—and with good reason. The clanging, coffin-like machine seems purpose-built for sensory assault. But you're not Ninja, a 3-year-old pit-bull mix, who trots into a lab at Emory University in Atlanta, catches a glimpse of the MRI in which she'll spend her morning and leaps happily onto the table.

Ninja is one of the few dogs in the world that have been trained to sit utterly still in an MRI (the little bits of hot dog she gets as rewards help) so that neuroscientist Gregory Berns can peer into her brain as it works. "What's it like to be a dog?" Berns asks, a question that is both the focus of his work and the thrust of his next book. "No one can know with certainty. But I think our dogs are experiencing things very much the way we do."

That is what we want to believe. Our love affair with dogs has been going on for 15,000 years, and there's no sign that it's flagging. About 44 percent of families in the U.S. include at least one dog, meaning a canine population of up to 80 million.

Most of the time, we give our dogs very good lives. We fancy that they understand us, and maybe they do: come home sad and they'll nuzzle your hand. They don't have language, but they communicate volumes—with their eyes, with their barks, with their entire expressive bodies.

Read the whole story