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**Community of the mortals.
Companion animals thanatology
in the perspective of multispecies ethnography**

Summary of the doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of prof. dr. hab. Dariusz Czaja
at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Jagiellonian University.

The subject of the dissertation focuses on the issue of cultural reception of disease, dying, death and loss of companion animals, based on the experience of the caretakers. The primary research purpose of the work is to determine whether the experiences related to dying and death can be considered – and if so, to what extent and form – as existential experiences that create an interspecies community. Following the above thesis, observation and analysis were made of the ideas, beliefs and practices of the caretakers and the cultural framework in which the social perception of animal dying and death is constructed in relation to the established cultural constructs related to the experience of human dying and death. In line with the adopted paradigm of multispecies ethnography, which postulates extending the field of interest of anthropology to other species and include animals understood as social actors in the research process, the interspecies relationship between caretakers and terminally ill animals, and the behaviour of the animals themselves, was also treated as an important research subject. The research was largely based on narrative interviews with caretakers and observations.

The first part of the dissertation discusses the theoretical background of the problem: the philosophical foundations of the moral status of animals and cultural ideas about their dying and death, the socio-historical context of the human-animal relationship and the methodological approach to the research. The second part is devoted to the analysis of the empirical material and consists of six chapters considering the cross-section of issues related to the subject under study:

(1) palliative care of pets; (2) euthanasia issues and accompaniment in the process of dying; (3) experience of loss and mourning of pets; (4) ideas about companion animals' afterlife; (5) caretakers' beliefs and practices related to the pets' burial; (6) memory related to deceased companion animals and remembrance practices of caretakers. The third part of the dissertation portrays six case studies: caretakers' stories about their experience of their live with pets and their loss. The fourth part presents a separate study devoted to the Hospicjum dla Bezdomnych Kotów (Hospice for Homeless Cats) Foundation. The last, fifth, part summarizes the key conclusions emerging from the research in relation to the research goals set. Moreover, the antinomy that characterizes the experience of losing a companion animal is indicated, the basis of which is the inconsistency of individual experiences of the caretakers and the broadly understood cultural approach to the human-animal relationship. A consequence of this phenomenon is the caretakers' need to include the discussed experience within the scope of known and accepted cultural norms, which results in the gradual emergence of alternative cultural frameworks for individual ways of experiencing companion animal death.

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