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5. The set of linear superpositions in the space of continuous functions is closed	296
6. The set of linear superpositions in the space of continuous functions is nowhere dense	299
CHAPTER 5. Dimension of the space of linear superpositions	302
1. (ε, δ) -entropy and the “dimension” of function spaces	302
2. (ε, δ) -entropy of the set of linear superpositions	306
3. Functional “dimension” of the space of linear superpositions	311
4. Variation of superpositions of smooth functions	312
5. Instability of the representation of functions as superpositions of smooth functions	316
REFERENCES	317

PREFACE

By means of an algebraic substitution, the so-called Tschirnhaus transformation, the general algebraic equation of the n -th degree $x^n + a_1 x^{n-1} + a_2 x^{n-2} + \dots + a_{n-1} x + a_n = 0$ may be reduced to the form $y^n + b_4 y^{n-4} + b_5 y^{n-5} + \dots + b_{n-1} y + 1 = 0$. Further attempts by algebraists to reduce the solution of the general algebraic equation to the solution of equations containing a smaller number of parameters remained unsuccessful for a long time (the problem of resolvents).

In his famous Mathematical Problems [1] Hilbert looked at this problem in a new way, formulating it as No. 13 in the following form: the impossibility of solving the general equation of the 7-th degree by means of functions of only two variables. To prove this Hilbert regarded it as possible to show that the equation of the 7-th degree $f^7 + xf^3 + yf^2 + zf + 1 = 0$ is not soluble by means of any continuous functions of only two variables.

Various mathematicians have understood the 13-th Problem differently and have attributed to it results of a different character.

Hilbert [3] found an algebraic substitution reducing the solution of the general algebraic equation of the 9-th degree to the solution of equations with 4 parameters. Hilbert proved also the existence of analytic functions of three variables not representable by superpositions of functions of only two variables. Ostrowski [2] constructed an analytic function of two variables not representable as a superposition of infinitely differentiable functions of one variable and arithmetic operations. The author [4] proved the

existence of smooth functions of several variables not representable by superpositions of smooth functions of a smaller number of variables.

Bieberbach [5] attempted to prove that there exist continuous functions of three variables, not representable as a superposition of continuous functions of two variables. Not for nothing did Bieberbach call the 13-th Problem “unfortunate” (see [6]). Many years later, by the combined efforts of Kolmogorov [7], [9] and Arnol’d [8], the opposite was proved. So Hilbert’s conjecture was shown to be false. By Kolmogorov’s theorem any continuous function of several variables can be represented by means of a superposition of continuous functions of a single variable and the operation of addition.

Hilbert’s 13-th problem gave rise to a great number of investigations in algebra and analysis, but the kernel of the problem never the less remains untouched. In this connection Lorentz [12] made an expressive analogy. The example of Peano of a mapping of an interval onto a square does not answer the question about the difference between an interval and a square. In the same way the theorem of Kolmogorov does not close the 13-th problem, but only makes it more interesting. It is known, for example, that superpositions of Kolmogorov’s type, composed of smooth functions, do not even represent all analytic functions [48].

Thus, Hilbert’s idea of proving the impossibility of solving the general equation of the 7-th degree by means of functions of only two variables can be developed in a more positive way. Results available at present do not contradict, for example, the possibility that the function $f(x, y, z)$ defined by the equation $f^7 + xf^3 + yf^2 + zf + 1 \equiv 0$ is not a finite superposition of analytic functions of two variables. On the other hand nobody has disproved that any algebraic function is a superposition of algebraic functions of a single variable and arithmetic operations.

This paper is a summary of the lectures given at the University of California in Los Angeles in April-May of 1977. Chapter I presents a survey of results, the remaining chapters are devoted to proofs.

CHAPTER 1. — SURVEY OF RESULTS

The survey presented is based on the surveys [10]-[12], [33]-[35]. It also covers recent results:

Definition. We will say that a function $f = f(x_1, \dots, x_n)$ is a superposition of the functions