

**STUDY OF THE NONLINEAR  
PROPAGATION OF FEMTOSECOND  
LASER PULSES**

Thesis by

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Pasadena, California

2005

(Defended May 11, 2005)

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In my five years as a student at Caltech I have learned a great deal about both science and life. The journey has been as rewarding as challenging. I am very grateful to my advisor Demetri Psaltis for the many lessons he taught me about optics, research and life as a scientist. I will always be indebted to him for accepting me in his group (even though I did not know the first thing about optics), where I have greatly benefited from his creativity and vision. His trust and support have been instrumental in my accomplishments.

I would like to thank my mentor in the lab and good friend, Zhiwen Liu. It was a pleasure and a great opportunity to work with such a brilliant mind, who also had the patience to teach me. I am indebted to George Panotopoulos and Jose Mumbru for their guidance during my first years. George was an endless source of judicious advice and a dear friend. Jose was a reference on experimental skills and also provided a touch of humor when it was most needed. Hung-te Hsieh was my companion in the bumpy road to graduation, it was refreshing to share and office with him as he always brought plenty of excitement. Very special thanks to Lucinda Acosta for the administrative support, but more importantly for her moral support and friendship. She provided comfort in the times of frustration and helped me maintain a positive attitude.

I greatly benefited from collaborating with Ye Pu, a very good experimentalist and electronics wizard with whom I shared countless hours in the lab, Mankei Tsang, who helped me with the theoretical work, and Karsten Buse, who gave me excellent comments and advice during his visits from Germany. For their help and support, I would also like to thank Yayun Liu, David Erickson, Chris Moser, Greg Steckman, Greg Billock, Wenhai Liu, Manos Fitrakis, Todd Meyrath, Zhenyu Li, Hua Long, Jim Adleman, Eric Ostby, David McKeen and Baiyang Li. My friends, both here and at home have allowed me to keep a healthy balance between work and play.

Caltech was also the place where I met my beautiful wife Lucia, who became my muse and endless source of happiness. Her love is truly a blessing. My older brother has been a positive influence in my life, and I know he will always be there for me. All of my family has supported me in this adventure and surrounded me with their affection. Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my father and my mother. Every success is a direct consequence of their influence in my life and their love.

## ABSTRACT

This work presents a comprehensive study of the propagation of femtosecond pulses and the formation and evolution of spatial solitons. The first half (Chapters 2-3) is devoted to the implementation of a novel ultrafast holographic system to capture the nonlinear propagation of laser pulses with femtosecond resolution. Femtosecond pulses are used to record holograms of the ultrafast changes in the material properties. Amplitude and phase changes of the laser beam inside the medium are reconstructed numerically. The strength of the nonlinear material response and the density of free electrons can be recovered from the phase information in the hologram. A single hologram can be captured with fine spatial resolution, or a time-sequence of holograms can be captured in a single shot with reduced spatial resolution. We have observed dramatic differences in the light propagation depending on the material properties.

The second part of the thesis (Chapters 4-5) covers the formation and evolution of spatial solitons in a Kerr medium. We have measured the evolution of the beam profile as a function of pulse energy and propagation length. The optical beam breaks up into a pattern of connected lines (constellation) and self-focused spots (solitons). The solitons self-focus to a minimum diameter and release their excess energy through conical emission, which in turn overlaps with the background constellation and seeds the formation of new solitons. The solitons also show a collective self-organizing behavior caused by their mutual interactions. The evolution of 1-D arrays of solitons was captured using Femtosecond Time-resolved Optical Polarigraphy, a technique that measures the transient birefringence

induced by the pulses in the medium. When the array was generated in an unstable configuration, the solitons re-arranged themselves into an array with a (larger) more stable period. A transition to a chaotic state is observed when the input power is increased above a threshold level. A time-averaged pulse propagation equation was used to numerically solve for evolution of the beam. There was good agreement between the experimental results and the computer simulation.

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