Contents

Nomenclature ii

Summary vi

Résumé viii

Samenvatting x

Sommario xii

1 Introduction 1

2 Liquid crystals and solitons 5
- 2.1 Thermotropic liquid crystals . . . 5
- 2.2 Nematics . . . 6
  - 2.2.1 Dielectric tensor . . . 6
  - 2.2.2 Free energy in the continuum theory . . . 7
  - 2.2.3 Electric field responses . . . 8
- 2.3 Chiral nematic LCs . . . 10
  - 2.3.1 Optical band-gap . . . 10
  - 2.3.2 Free energy in the continuum theory . . . 12
  - 2.3.3 Electric field responses . . . 12
- 2.4 Liquid crystal cells . . . 14
  - 2.4.1 Fréedericksz threshold . . . 14
  - 2.4.2 Cell fabrication . . . 15
- 2.5 Optical solitons . . . 15
  - 2.5.1 Light propagation in dielectric media . . . 16
  - 2.5.2 Linear propagation . . . 17
  - 2.5.3 Optical Kerr soliton . . . 18
- 2.6 Nematicons . . . 20
  - 2.6.1 Constitutive equations . . . 21

3 Spatial fluctuations of solitons in LCs 25
- 3.1 Soliton propagation in LCs without noise . . . 25
  - 3.1.1 Propagation equation . . . 26
  - 3.1.2 Reorientation equation . . . 29
- 3.2 Numerical results . . . 31
  - 3.2.1 Importance of the frame of reference . . . 32
  - 3.2.2 LC reorientation, beam profile and walk-off . . . 32
- 3.3 Correlated thermal noise in LCs . . . 34
  - 3.3.1 Director correlation . . . 34
  - 3.3.2 Director correlation on the discretization grid . . . 36
  - 3.3.3 Generate a correlated noise . . . 37
- 3.4 Light propagation in LCs . . . 38
  - 3.4.1 Linear propagation and speckle formation . . . 39
  - 3.4.2 Nematicon propagation, numerical and experimental . . . 39
- 3.5 Conclusions . . . 43

4 Optical gain in liquid crystals **45**
4.1 Organic semiconductors . . . 46
4.1.1 Excited species in organics . . . 49
4.2 Pump-probe technique . . . 50
4.2.1 The experimental setup . . . 50
4.2.2 The pump-probe signal . . . 51
4.3 Dyes in LCs . . . 52
4.3.1 Photophysical characterization . . . 53
4.3.2 Amplified spontaneous emission . . . 55
4.4 Polymers in LCs: PFO . . . 56
4.4.1 Preparation of the sample . . . 57
4.4.2 Morphology, absorption and photoluminescence of the samples . . . 57
4.4.3 Photophysical characterization . . . 60
4.5 Conclusion . . . 64

5 Chiral nematic liquid crystals for tuning and feedback **65**
5.1 Uniform lying helix . . . 65
5.2 Sample preparation . . . 66
5.2.1 Shear-flow technique . . . 67
5.2.2 Solvent evaporation technique . . . 68
5.3 Contrast ratio . . . 71
5.4 Flexoelectro-optic effect . . . 72
5.4.1 Measurement of the tilt angle . . . 72
5.4.2 Flexoelectro-optic characterization . . . 73
5.5 Spatial instabilities . . . 74
5.6 In-plane characterization . . . 75
5.7 Conclusion . . . 76

6 Interplay between gain, nonlinearities and feedback **79**
6.1 ASE and nematicon . . . 79
6.1.1 The optical setup . . . 79
6.1.2 Results and discussion . . . 81
6.2 Investigation of lasing from dye-doped solvent-induced polymerized ULH . . . 84
6.2.1 Sample preparation via two-photon photopolymerization . . . 85
6.2.2 Investigation of laser emission . . . 88
6.3 Conclusion . . . 90

7 Conclusions **91**
7.1 Outlook . . . 91

A Notation for the permittivity **93**

B Matlab code **94**
B.1 Main section . . . 94
B.2 Propagation equation . . . 101
B.3 Optimization of the moleculer orientation . . . 103
B.4 Correlation matrix . . . 104
B.5 Auxiliary functions . . . 105

Bibliography **124**