There are various efficient (very efficient) implementations of systems for computing stable models and answer sets, employing splitting sets and other tricks and optimisations. Further development is an active area of current research, usually falling under the label of ‘Answer Set Programming’ (ASP).

One well known system is SMOCKELS. See http://www.tcs.hut.fi/Software/smodels/. The system DLV is also widely used though I know little about it myself. See http://www.dbai.tuwien.ac.at/proj/dlv/. A state-of-the-art system that is becoming widely used is CLASP. 

http://www.cs.uni-potsdam.de/clasp.

CLASP is installed on the DoC lab machines (see course web pages) and will (probably) be used as part of the assessed coursework.

The grounder (gringo)

The grounders used in ASP systems are very clever! There is much ingenuity here. They do much more than merely generating all ground instances of the clauses in native fashion.

From the CLASP manual: ‘The main task of a grounder is to substitute the variables in a logic program by terms such that the result is a finite equivalent ground program. (Two programs are equivalent if they have the same answer sets.) Of course, a necessary condition for this is that the program possesses only finitely many finite answer sets.’ So, one can do various tricks during grounding, as long as they preserve answer sets.

Simple example

\[
\begin{align*}
q(0, f(0)). \\
p(X) &\leftarrow q(X, Y), \text{ not } p(Y).
\end{align*}
\]

This program has an infinite Herbrand base (because it has terms 0, \( f(0), f(f(0)), \ldots \)) and so infinitely many ground instances of its clauses. However, it is equivalent to the finite ground program

\[
\begin{align*}
q(0, f(0)). \\
p(0) &\leftarrow q(0, f(0)), \text{ not } p(f(0)).
\end{align*}
\]

and has a single, finite answer set \( \{ q(0, f(0)), p(0) \} \). gringo can handle cases like this.

More generally, gringo deals with a special syntactic category of logic programs called level-restricted logic programs.

A level-restricted logic program is easy to detect syntactically, and has the property that it is equivalent to a finite ground program. Details of the definition are omitted here — they are not difficult but I did not have time to cover. Look at the CLASP documentation if you are interested.

Maximal stratified sub-programs \( P' \subseteq P \) is a stratified sub-program of \( P \) if \( P' \) is stratified and no predicate \( p \) in \( P' \) is the head of any clause in \( P - P' \). A stratified sub-program \( P' \subseteq P \) is maximal if every stratified sub-program of \( P \) is contained in \( P' \). From the CLASP manual: ‘...every logic program has a maximal stratified sub-program, which is also easy to determine.’

So, besides doing other stuff, gringo

- identifies the maximal stratified sub-program \( P' \) of \( P \) (I don’t know how this is done but apparently it is easy);
- calculates the (unique) answer set of \( P' \) (no search required here — the iterated fixpoint method will do it — and this can be very efficient);
- uses the answer set of \( P' \) to simplify/ground the ‘top’ part \( P - P' \), similarly to the way we used splitting sets to ground/simplify programs in earlier examples.

Clasp: gringo, clasp and clingio

In common with most ASP systems, the computation of answer sets in CLASP has two phases: first, a grounder constructs ground instances of the clauses in the program, replacing variables by ground (variable-free) terms, possibly with some further transformations and simplifications. Then, the resulting ground program (usually in a special, machine-readable format) is passed to the actual solver which computes the answer sets.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{logic program} &\xrightarrow{\text{grounder (gringo)}} \text{ground logic program} &\xrightarrow{\text{solver (clasp)}} \text{answer set(s)}
\end{align*}
\]

In the CLASP system the grounder is called gringo; clasp is the solver itself.

Clasp also provides a utility clingio which calls gringo and pipes its output to the solver clasp automatically.

lparse is another widely used grounder. It is the grounder that comes with the SMOCKELS and DLV systems. (The clasp solver can also take lparse outputs.)

The grounder (gringo)

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Note finally that the maximal stratified sub-program trick is not enough by itself: we still need the level-restricted constraint, or something similar.

**Example** (from the CLASP manual)

\[
\text{nat}(0).
\text{nat}(s(X)) \leftarrow \text{nat}(X).
\]

This program is stratified (trivially) so it has a unique answer set (obviously). But this answer set is not finite: gringo can’t handle it.

It is often very instructive to see how much work gringo does when grounding a program. You can see the gringo output in readable form by running it with the -t option. See the brief instructions provided with the DoC installation (details on course web pages).

**Answer Set Programming**

This is a huge area. There are whole courses devoted to it. It is a kind of constraint solving paradigm. The program expresses the constraints; its answer sets are the solutions.

And ASP solvers can deal with much richer languages than (extended) logic programs:

- extended logic programs
- disjunctive logic programs
- integrity constraints
  \[
  \leftarrow L_1, \ldots, L_m \implies f \leftarrow L_1, \ldots, L_m, \neg f
  \]
- choice rules
  \[
  \{ A_1, \ldots, A_m \} \leftarrow L_1, \ldots, L_n
  \]
- cardinality constraints
  \[
  k_{\text{min}} \{ A_1, \ldots, A_m \} \leq k_{\text{max}} \leftarrow L_1, \ldots, L_n
  \]
- weight constraints
- aggregation operators
- optimisation constructs

And more!