Humour analysis

What is the context of the humour?

* Teller – who is the source of the humour? (writer, comedian, character in films or shows, ...)
* Tellee – who are the receivers of the humour? (reader, audience, viewers, specific groups, ...)
* Situation – where and when is the humour communicated? (book, article, show, film, ...)
	+ Do we have the same context or does the humour need extra information in order to be understood?
	+ Are there boundaries of time, place or social groups that have to be crossed?

Who or what is the butt of the humour?

* The teller (self-deprecating humour)
* An element of everyday life (observational humour)
* A specific person (the superiority theory - satire)
* A group of people (the superiority theory)
	+ Nationalities
	+ Races
	+ Social groups
	+ Religious groups
	+ Women in general
	+ Men in general
	+ Groups of women
	+ Groups of men
	+ Sexualities
	+ et cetera...

What is the intension of the humour?

* Stance – the teller’s attitude towards the butt of the humour
	+ Positive – is the teller obviously fond of the butt?
		- Is the teller part of the group that is the butt? (self-deprecating humour)
	+ Neutral – no particular attitude.
	+ Negative – is the teller obviously criticising the butt?
		- Satire – criticising a supposed superior target
		- Is the butt presented as posing a threat – perhaps because they (are presented to) shake the teller’s and the tellee’s security in themselves?
* Intention
	+ To entertain – to poke a little good-natured fun at somebody or something
	+ To point out – to draw attention to something or someone
	+ To criticise – to draw attention to something that the teller thinks is wrong, perhaps to incite people to change that thing. So, what is the message?
* Tone of voice
	+ Parody
		- An imitation of something or somebody where the aim is to poke fun at the original by exaggerating certain traits
	+ Irony
		- Verbal irony – saying the opposite of what you mean. Usually the speaker will use a specific tone of voice to indicate that the statement is irony.
		- Dramatic irony – when a character’s words or actions indicate that he or she is unaware of something that the audience or readers are aware of.
		- Situational irony – when the actual result of an action is contrary to the desired result.
	+ Sarcasm
		- A cruel kind of (mostly verbal) irony. It is most often a sharp or cutting remark directed at somebody with the intention of hurting or putting the target down.

How is the humour created?

**1. The Incongruity Theory**

*When we realize that there is a gap between what we are presented with and the (real) world we expect to see, we are surprised, which causes us to laugh.*

* Double meaning
	+ plays on words/puns
		- homonyms (same spelling)
		- homophones (sounds alike)
		- schwa
	+ syntax (sentence structure)
		- compound words (e.g. cat drink)
		- stress and intonation
		- run-together language (e.g. some others vs. some mothers)
		- idioms (groups of words that you have to understand as a single unit)
		- prepositions
		- multi-word verbs (e.g. turn into a garage)
* Not honouring the expectations of the given situation
	+ Situation and register
	+ Situation and expected behaviour
	+ Expectations in discourse
	+ Relevance
* Removed from reality
	+ Absurd situations
	+ The surreal
	+ Non-sense

**2. The Superiority Theory**

* Aimed at people we feel are below us.

*By laughing at the idiots of the world, we avoid feeling like idiots ourselves.*

* + Mostly aimed at groups of people, because laughing at a specific inferior person would most likely be considered cruel, and therefore not funny.

* Aimed at people we feel are above us.

*We regain some of our power by imagining that we are better than those who make us feel powerless.*

* + Satire – mostly aimed at specific individuals like celebrities, royalty and politicians, but also sometimes aimed at groups like lawyers.

**3. The Relief Theory**

*Laughing at the things that we feel shameful about (taboos) releases nervous energy and distances us from it, so that we can stay in control.*

* Sex
* Excreta (the products of bodily functions)
* Death
* Disease
* Religion

And sometimes also

* Taboo words
	+ Non-medical words for sex and the associated body parts.
	+ Non-medical words for excreta.
	+ Derogative terms for groups of people (racist, sexist, religious, etc.)
* Racist ideas
* Terrorism
* Sexist ideas
* et cetera...

The relief theory could perhaps also explain why we laugh at awkward situations...