Judith Jarvis Thomson has pointed out that there is a difficulty in specifying the time a killing takes place.¹ To illustrate the problem suppose that Jones shoots B six times with a gun over a period of time T and that 72 hours later at T' B dies in the hospital while Jones in the meantime has been apprehended and is in jail. When did the killing occur? A plausible answer is that the act of killing is identical with the act of shooting and that the killing occurred during T.

But Thomson points out the following problems for this answer. First, at T* it is false to say that Jones has killed B because B is still alive. So at T* the killing has not occurred while the shooting has, and therefore the killing cannot be identified with the shooting. The same conclusion is supported by noting, secondly, that while the shooting occurred at T, the killing did not (since it is false that Jones killed B at T), and, thirdly, that while the death of B occurred 72 hours after the shooting, we would not wish to say that the death occurred 72 hours after the killing.

Thomson adopts the view that Jones' killing of B is an action that extends in time from the start of T to T' and includes as a part the death of B. And this explains the temporal differences noted in the previous paragraph. In her book *Acts and Other Events*² Thomson defends her position. Here I will argue that Thomson's defense of her position is unsuccessful and that, despite the problems of the previous paragraph, Jones' action of killing should not be said to extend beyond T.
First I will set out Thomson’s defense of her position. She begins by arguing that actions can include as parts events that are not actions. Thus it is possible that an action such as Jones’ killing B should include as a part an event which is not an action, e.g. B’s death. Then she further argues that in such a case the final part of the action may be an event which is not itself an action. Thus, even though B’s death is not an action of Jones’, it can be the final part of Jones’ action of killing B.

Her argument that an action may have as a part an event which is not an action proceeds as follows. Consider my action of cleaning the house on Friday which lasted from 10:30 in the morning until 5 that afternoon. This action has a number of distinct parts: my cleaning the carpets, my cleaning the living room, etc. Suppose I cleaned the kitchen floor with ‘Stuff’. You just pour Stuff on the floor, it dissolves the dirt, and all you have to do is wipe up the residue.

Suppose I’ve just poured Stuff on the floor and I am now standing there waiting for it to do its job. Is it true or false for me to say “I am now cleaning the house”? Some would say ‘true’ and others ‘false’, but whichever we say it is undeniable that an event is now occurring which is part of my action of cleaning the house, viz Stuff’s dissolving the dirt, for Stuff’s dissolving the dirt plays a part in getting the house clean. Hence, anyone who denies that I can truly say “I am now cleaning the house” must concede that the truth of this statement is not required in order for it to be true that my act of house-cleaning is occurring.

Now suppose my neighbour is using Super Stuff. This is poured on the floor and it then dissolves and disintegrates the dirt so that it is not necessary for you to wipe up anything afterward. My neighbour pours it out on her floor and is now waiting for it to do its work. Is Super Stuff’s dissolving and disintegrating the dirt part of my neighbour’s act of cleaning the house? Surely it is, Thomson says. For in the first case it is clear that Stuff’s dissolving the dirt is part of my action of cleaning the house because it plays a part in getting the house clean. Since Super Stuff’s dissolving and disintegrating the dirt plays a part in my neighbour’s getting her house clean it too should be counted as part of her act of cleaning her house.

Thus we see how an action may not only have an event which is not an action as a part, but that the final part of an action may be an event which is not an action. For Super Stuff’s dissolving and disintegrating the dirt may be the final part of my neighbour’s house-cleaning.