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Cheap AI

Cory Doctorow:

here's hardware hacker Pete Warden demoing a chatbot that you talk to and that talks back to you – and it's running on Synaptics System-on-a-Chip (SoC) that costs "low single digit dollars":

<https://petewarden.com/2025/10/16/why-does-a-local-ai-voice-agent-running-on-a-super-cheap-soc-matter/>

This is basically a little special-purpose Alexa, except it doesn't connect to the internet at all (and therefore doesn't leak any of your data). In Warden's demo, the gadget is a button-sized voice assistant that is meant to be integrated into a dishwasher, which can interpret the dishwasher's manual for you. If your dishes come out dirty or if the drain gets clogged, you press the button, describe your issue in pretty vague terms, and it instantly speaks aloud all the troubleshooting steps to deal with it.

This privacy-preserving, cheap-like-borscht component adds a voice-activated, conversational assistant to a device, sipping power like the clock on your microwave, running on a processor that costs less than a pack of AA batteries. It's *seriously* fucking cool.

There's going to be a lot of this AI, after the AI goes away – just like there was a lot of the web after the dotcom crash, when, overnight, San Francisco had infinity office-space, servers, and techies going begging.

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