Guides for *The Pickpocket*

The Pickpocket is a French film that was released in 1959 and masterly crafted and directed by Robert Bresson. Related in a way to Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, we explore a man--who is defined as a "criminal"--and we witness his soul in transit. He transforms through an encounter with an other--a movement of the soul.

I want you to pay attention to a few things:

1. Note the difference between this film (French) and American cinema. The director, Bresson takes this difference to the extreme:

    a. He uses "non-actors" (this is for the effect of reality / raw humanity / and to create unease in the viewer) Pay attention to the way you feel as you watch the actors--are they living up to your "expectations" as a viewer? What about reality? What about feeling uncomfortable?
    b. Bresson does not use close ups, and he changes the conventional timing of entrances and exits of actors in the scene. See if you notice this. Why do you think he does this?
    c. Breson does not use very much music in the film, and when he does, he uses it in unexpected ways… Think about why this might be…
    d. In the last scene, there is the only close up of the film, and the music seems to "match up" with the emotion for the first time. What does this mean?

2. Pay attention to the following themes:
    a. Repentance / Confession / Redemption
    b. Prison vs. Freedom
    c. Prophet / Truth
    d. Encounter with an other (Who does he meet who "opens his eyes"?)
    e. What is the meaning of love?
    f. Others?

3. Make note of the following scenes / lines:
    a. The pickpocket training scene
    b. "Do you know what prison is?"
    c. "To open your eyes to the way you are."
    d. Scene with the baby
    e. Final scene
    f. Your observations?

4. How do we see a “movement of a soul” in this film? What are the visual and audio cues that make us aware of this?

5. What is this man living? List observations about the following:
    a. His clothes
    b. His room
    c. His face
    d. His beliefs
    e. His awareness
    f. His relationships
        i. Friends
        ii. Family
        iii. Business
    g. His love (What does he love? How does he love? How does this change?)

6. Who is Jeanne? Why is she different?